

# Spiritual Wellness As A Tool Against The Effects Of A Pandemic: Experiences Of Some Australian Families In The Wake Of The Covid-19 Pandemic

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## Abstract

Based on the mixed feelings as to whether spirituality offers wellness during trouble times, this study explored how families used spiritual wellness as a tool against the COVID-19 pandemic. The objective was to understand the participant's spiritual wellness in order to find out the impact of the pandemic on their specific aspects of spiritual wellness and then to determine the spiritual pathways they used to manage their challenges during COVID-19, as well as further recommendations made by participants toward enhancing spiritual wellness in the future especially during crisis situations, such as the unprecedented COVID-19 pandemic. The aftermath effect of the pandemic still lingers among many lives today. Therefore, knowing how some used spiritual wellness as a dimension of wellness to overcome the chaos will be a lesson for many to consider. The study followed a qualitative approach (interviews), involving 12 families based in Melbourne, Australia, to examine how the pandemic impacted their spiritual wellness, the pathways of wellness they used as they transitioned through the pandemic, as well as recommendations made by families going forward.. The findings revealed that spiritual wellness was maintained

through engaging in virtual spiritual activities, keeping a positive spirit, and being motivated, while practicing yoga and meditation offered optimism, hope, and confidence as well as positive feelings about the future. This attests to the fact that, spirituality can serve as a great source of power that can transcend beyond all situations to generate wellness.

Keywords: Confidence, COVID-19, Families, Pandemic, Spirituality, Wellness.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality goes to the origin of concern, treatment, and passion. It presents a discernment of belonging as well as existential relationship, thereby sustaining spiritual health (Coppola, Rania, Parisi & Lagomarsino, 2021). Simply put, spiritual wellness includes having function, definition, and also a feeling of equilibrium as well as tranquillity (Swarbrick & Yudof, 2015). As asserted by Coppola et al. (2021), values have been mounted in the connection between spirituality, an extra understanding of wellness, natural and also psychic wellness. An important attribute of spirituality is dealing, or taking care of demanding scenarios such as COVID-19. Spiritual coping can be taken as behavioural efforts to ensure protection during challenging situations (Coppola et al., 2021).

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, locating some possibility for self-reflection; focusing on understanding self-confidence; and revealing and getting in touch with something a lot larger than us perhaps enhanced our individual total wellness and also spiritual wellness (Binghamton University, 2021). The harmful and spreading out nature of the COVID-19 pandemic produced a collection of severe impacts on the various dimensions of wellness among people worldwide (Binghamton University, 2021). The globe was affected by the problems caused by the pandemic in cases such as social distancing; the cessation of shopping, entertainment centres, colleges, community facilities, spiritual conventions; as well as functioning from other locations (Lagomarsino, Coppola & Rania, 2020). Locating relief in spiritual tasks possibly helped in mitigating some of the effects of the pandemic.

In the absence of social distancing, important meeting points for socialisation were essential support centres for typical spiritual aid. Remarkably, while meeting points were much more essential throughout the difficult duration, there were some challenges because of social distancing protocols. Despite this, the population, revealing flexibility and also variant capabilities, promptly performed alternate systems to adjust to the social arrest into which they were constricted. For example, these consisted of various online drives to supply physical, psychological, and also spiritual resilience and success (Yang, Zhang & Kou, 2016). Numerous online teams met to practice spirituality exercises with each other (Yang, Lai, Fan & Mo, 2021). This synchronised with what was implied by the significance of such activities, as well as a feeling of equilibrium and also tranquillity (Swarbrick & Yudof, 2015).

## **2. CONCEPTUALISING SPIRITUAL WELLNESS**

This study considered wellness as the “active pursuit of activities, choices, and lifestyles that lead to a state of holistic health” (Global Wellness Institute n. d.). Wellness is fundamentally distinct from well-being, since well-being implies a subjective condition, enjoying happiness or when an individual is in a state of well-being. However, wellness is accomplished through a process of actively making choices, that result in optimal health and well-being (Goodman, Disabato, Kashdan and Kauffman 2018). Generally, wellness is distinct from the medical paradigm. While well-being often pertains to the treatment of an illness or healing a sick patient, wellness denotes moving from a state of neutral to optimal health (Oliver, Baldwin and Datta 2019). Wellness is also considered to be a holistic and multidimensional concept, including social, emotional, spiritual, environmental, physical, occupational, financial, and intellectual wellness (Swarbrick and Yudof 2015). Meditating, regular exercises, and eating a balanced diet are some of the approaches to attaining wellness in individuals and families. Thus, health promotions aimed at identifying and helping individuals within the family moving from poor health to an optimal state of well-being will mean wellness. This makes the concept one of a continuum phenomenal. Further, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for wellness programmes,

especially among developed nations were increasing. Hence, there is growing awareness that wellness contributes to sustainability in all spheres of life, and can improve one's physical, spiritual, environmental and emotional health, among other dimensions of wellness (Ali-Knight and Ensor 2017).

As such, spirituality is at the root of care, compassion, and interest. As such, it points toward a discernment of belonging and existential correlation, thus supporting spiritual wellness (Coppola et al. 2021). In other words, spiritual wellness involves having meaning, purpose, and a sense of balance and peace (Swarbrick and Yudof 2015). As noted by Coppola et al. (2021), the importance has been illustrated in the relationship between spirituality and a more attractive understanding of well-being, psychic and natural health (Binghamton University 2021). More so, research by Olonade, Adetunde, Iwelumor, Ozoya and George (2021) revealed that spirituality is a solid feeling of the convention, even when faced with scientific outcomes. Despite this, some spiritual leaders suggested that COVID-19 was an outcome of disobedience of men and thus, a penalty from God (Olonade et al., 2021; Duffy, 2020). However, this thought was tested, by the participants in this study, when they revealed that when the outbreak became a public health risk, they followed precautionary measures (Olonade et al., 2021; Sahni, Singh Sharma & Garg 2020). In other words, the mere acceptance of clinical stories can develop a spiritual ailment.

A fundamental feature of spirituality is coping, or the duty accomplished by spiritual well-being in handling stressful and distressing situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, spiritual coping can be interpreted as awareness of and behavioural attempts to gain or secure direction, meaning, and relationships in the face of complex circumstances (Coppola et al. 2021). Additionally, spiritual wellness involves a judgment of confidence and purpose; and is associated with something more important than oneself (i.e., reconciliation, religion) (Binghamton University 2021).

### **3. COVID-19 AND SPIRITUAL WELLNESS**

Accordingly, through the COVID-19 pandemic, finding opportunities for self-reflection; focusing on

understanding confidence; and expressing and connecting with something much bigger than oneself may help to improve a person's overall wellness, including spiritual wellness became important (Binghamton University, 2021). Relatedly, the widespread devastating nature of the COVID-19 has created a pandemonium of misery, tension, and devastating effects on people's psychic and economic health from a global perspective. Alterations encompassing social distancing; the cessation of stores, entertainments centers, schools, town centers, and spiritual conventions; and remote-working have all impacted wellness in varying degrees (Lagomarsino et al. 2020). Thus, finding solace in spiritual activities can potentially alleviate some of the wellness challenges (Coppola et al. 2021).

With social distancing, critical meeting places for spiritual and religious practices have not only negatively impacted opportunities for socialization, but have affected people meeting to exercise spiritual wellness. While meeting places are more crucial during this challenging period, they have been deficient due to social distancing protocols. Regardless of this, the populace, showing versatility and variation abilities, quickly executed compensatory systems to adapt to the social confinement into which they were constrained. These included various online drives to offer physical, mental, and spiritual strength and prosperity (Yang et al. 2021). Various online groups met to rehearse spiritual-strict exercises "together" (Yang et al. 2021). This synchronizes with what is meant by meaning; purpose; and a sense of balance and peace by Swarbrick and Yudof (2015). Moreover, Yang et al. (2021) contended how the utilization of 360° virtual visits offered people experiences in a few seconds, while remaining at home. As such online channels assisted in decreasing the social isolation pressure brought about by the pandemic (Yang et al. 2021).

#### **4. SAMPLE SELECTION AND DATA COLLECTION**

A non-probability, convenience sampling technique was utilized, and face-face semi-structured meetings on various days, either in person or by means of zoom, were conducted with numerous families. The households consisted of Aborigines; gay pairs; solitary moms and dad households; straight households; childless pairs; minority group; migrants, senior citizens, as well as open up to all

racers to make certain of variety and representivity. The 12 families constituted a single household. The meetings were halted once saturation was reached.

The convenience sampling technique was based on recommendations from the manager of a regional NGO, working with various families. Following his approval, the very first household was approached to seek their consent to take part in the study. They were notified of the objectives of the study, and issued with a letter of information. They signed letters of consent if they agreed to participate in the interviews. Apart from the recommendations made by the manager, the referred families also made further recommendations of other families.

The meetings were performed throughout the month of January 2022 and March 2022, either face to face or via Zoom. Where applicable, all the participants observed rigorous COVID-19 procedures, such as social distancing and wearing masks throughout the meetings. Meetings were executed in a roomy atmosphere which was sterilized prior to, as well as after each meeting.

##### **5. INCLUSION/ EXCLUSION CRITERIA**

The study was targeted at family members that have actually been "knowingly associated with spiritual methods", and this was an uncompromised pre-condition for inclusion. Only individuals over the age of 18 were included in the research, while non-residents or undocumented family members were left out. People with converging identification elements such as psychological or intellectual infirmity were also excluded to maintain trustworthiness of the results.

##### **6. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD**

The research was a qualitative one (interviews with families), taking into consideration the nature of information that may be sensitive; and was adapted to the social context within which it is produced, instead of depending on remote, inflexible, as well as inferential techniques (Denscombe, 2014). The interviews were recorded and evaluated with the NVivo 12 software by a technique called thematic evaluation. This is a versatile as well as systematic method that can adjust information into themes and subthemes. The meetings created digital information via voice recordings, and evaluated to attain

the purpose of the study which was: a) impact of COVID-19 on specific aspects of families’ spiritual wellness, and b) pathways to the management of spiritual wellness during COVID-19.

**7. ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEWS**

**Themes and subthemes**

As stated in the literature review, spiritual wellness involves having a purpose; meaning; and a sense of balance and peace (Swarbrick and Yudof 2015). Furthermore, the importance of spiritual wellness has been installed in the relationship between spirituality and a more attractive understanding of well-being; and natural and psychic health (Coppola et al. 2021). Given the negative consequences of COVID-19 on wellness, this study explored the impact of COVID-19 on specific aspects of spiritual wellness of families; how families managed their spiritual wellness as they transitioned through the pandemic; and some of the recommendations made by families regarding the promotion of spiritual wellness in the future. Particularly, the aim was to determine how the participants and their families reconstructed their spiritual wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The narrative which follows is underpinned by a discussion of the following subthemes which emerged for spiritual wellness under the 3 themes.

**Table1: Themes and subthemes**

THEMES	SUBTHEMES
1.Impact of COVID-19 on specific aspects of spiritual wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal values and continuing with your beliefs about life</li> <li>• Making conscious choices about daily actions based on your personal values</li> <li>• Drawing on beliefs and values to give direction during times of frustration</li> <li>• Prayer, meditation, and/or quiet personal reflection regularly on life</li> <li>• Continuing to find meaning and purpose in life</li> <li>• Drawing on the beliefs and values of others to give direction</li> <li>• Ability to be optimistic and have faith in</li> </ul>

	<p>the future</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to appreciate natural forces that exist in the universe</li> <li>• Ability to feel continued gratitude for the good things in life</li> </ul>
2. Pathways of spiritual wellness used during COVID-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engaging in virtual spiritual activities</li> <li>• Keeping a positive spirit</li> <li>• Motivating others</li> <li>• Yoga and meditation</li> </ul>
3. Recommended changes to spiritual wellness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retreats</li> <li>• Engaging in yoga and meditation</li> <li>• Engaging with others</li> <li>• Visiting sacred sites/ traditional feasts</li> </ul>

## 8. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### Theme 1: Impact of COVID-19 on specific aspects of spiritual wellness

Much evidence points to COVID-19 tremendously influencing individuals' tasks, regimens, source of incomes, psychological health and wellness (Suter, 2020). The effect on spiritual wellness is no exception (Walsh, 2019). This subtheme examined the influence of COVID-19 on certain facets of the individuals' and their family members' spiritual health.

Subtheme 1: Personal values and continuing with your beliefs about life

The possible benefits spiritual observances for wellness and success have useful end results that reflect real health, minimize the threat of infection, and effective responses to therapy (Walsh, 2019). Regarding the influence of COVID-19 on individual and family values; and also proceeding with their values and beliefs, participants revealed the following:

- Strengthening of beliefs and value

Almost all of the families interviewed, mentioned that the pandemic had actually enhanced their ideas and also value systems. Several of them shared that the pandemic was a verification to the scriptures that such occasions will certainly come.



....our beliefs about life were strengthened by scriptures, which say these types of challenges will take place. Our value system was not waived; in fact, it was tested (Family 10).

It strengthened our personal values, and we became more faithful and believed in God and our ancestors (Family 7). The above is not unusual because of the apocalyptic outlook of religious beliefs and all-natural catastrophes. Dein (2020) said that throughout the past, pandemics and also apocalyptic stories have actually been closely associated. Thus, claims that the pandemic enhanced some of the ideas and also values of the families restated the stories.

Others recommended that regardless of the unfavourable effect of the pandemic, it additionally repeated that every experience was a kind of learning experience.

COVID-19 did not affect our values and beliefs about life. Although the pandemic did have a negative impact on other areas of life, we remained dependent on God, constantly reaffirming that every experience is a learning experience and the pandemic will build our resilience (Family 5).

Thus, appreciating being alive became a solidarity call according to the participant from family 6.

Personal values and beliefs about life were tested. We could no longer take life for granted, we appreciated being alive, that there is more to life than wanting to be affluent. We were now more grateful for being healthy, having a roof over our heads and having a stable, functional family (Family 6).

- Optimism

Yang, Zhang and Kou (2016) claimed that gratefulness, hope, positive outlook as well as life fulfilment are solid forecasters of mental health. This suggests that with a favourable state of mind, individuals can prevail over any kind of difficulties in their health. This is additionally obvious from the declarations listed below which reveal that through positive outlook some families proceeded with their ideas regarding life.

Even with brief episodes of feeling that we were losing control, we ensured that we did not lose sight of what was important to us such as remaining optimistic, knowing that we had a purpose to fulfil as a couple, parents, grandparents and friends (Family 1).

Despite the despondency and turmoil in our lives, we are strong believers in having faith and persevering no matter what the obstacles are. Keeping the family together, coupled with ensuring that our employees were not left destitute, kept us hopeful that this pandemic will pass and life will ultimately be restored to normality (Family 3).

Subtheme 2: Making conscious choices about daily actions based on your personal values

With regard to the individuals making mindful options concerning day-to-day activities based upon their individual values, the following emerged from the interviews:

- Directed by value system

Many of the families stated that making mindful decisions concerning their everyday activities based upon their individual values was directed by their values system. These value systems consisted of sincerity, honesty, commitment, compassion and also empathy.

Our actions and decisions are guided by a value system based on honesty, integrity loyalty, empathy, and compassion. We will not allow our values to be compromised during stressful situations, rather we would count on our values to help us make morally right decisions (Family 10).

Became more serious about decisions that are important in life. Choices were not based on self-centeredness. Made conscious efforts to bring happiness to as many as possible, as far as our means could allow us to do so (Family 12).

Making conscious choices about our daily actions is part of our strong value system based on fulfilling our roles and responsibilities in an honest, trustful and loyal way to all those who count on us (Family 3).

Make sure that when you consider your values in decision-making, you keep your sense of integrity and that what you know is right and approach decisions with confidence and clarity. One must also know that what you're doing is best for your current and future happiness and satisfaction (Family 4).

A good value system is vital as it assists in reinforcing household unity. This was supported by the declaration from family 2.

Our values such as happiness, success and upliftment motivate us to achieve our goals. Our decisions are based on our priorities in life. This also helps to maintain our happiness as a family and keep our family as a cohesive unit (Family 2).

- Positive thoughts

Hopefulness is a vital psychological source resulting in facing life misfortunes better and also keeping great psychological wellness either throughout difficult occasions or throughout life obstacles (Cruz, 2021). This was illustrated in several of the families' options regarding their day-to-day activities which were led or affected by favourable ideas.

No matter how challenging life can become, we have responsibilities. Life is not perfect, some are worse off than us. Thus we need to use whatever energies we have to move forward with courage, determination and positive thoughts. God will guide us, so long as we live wholesome lives. Never give up, as each experience is a learning curve (Family 1).

We continued to think positively, observe prayer life and other meditation activities; and did not conduct ourselves irresponsibly or shamelessly as our values remained firm (Family 5).

- Dedicated time for spiritual practices

The advantages of spiritual wellness of families have been highlighted in the study. This influenced the dedication of time to spiritual practices in the everyday activities of participants during lockdown.

Spending more time at home, we dedicated more time to reading about our spiritual practices, which gave us the confidence not to relinquish our value systems because of crisis situations, but rather to use the strength of our values to make decisions for the benefit of all (Family 11).

Subtheme 3: Drawing on beliefs and standards to give direction during times of frustration

The relevance of beliefs and standards systems have shown to be important to most of the families', during the pandemic which was considered a frustrating period. With regard to making use of these ideas as well as standards to provide pathways during the trying times of

the pandemic, most of the families trusted their beliefs and values, while some chose to remain still.

- Counted on beliefs and values

Amongst those that relied on their beliefs and values, the ensuing came to light:

We counted on our values and beliefs to move in the right direction as we did before the pandemic (Family 11).

Remained steadfast in our beliefs and values, as it was our guiding force before the pandemic (Family 12).

We believe in the power of God, and through faith, honesty and trust we remained hopeful that god's favour and grace will direct us on the path of a good life (Family 5).

Beliefs and values remained engrained, as our value systems were not determined by situations, but rather over time through the influence of family, friends, society and life experiences. We hold very definite and genuine value systems, which helped us to assess the challenges, draw on the good and discard the bad (Family 6).

The above mirrors the solid impact of the beliefs and values in traversing the challenging circumstances surrounding the pandemic. It appeared that the reliance on God's abysmal link with family and friends, as well as the larger culture aided the families' life. One family member pointed out that the value system was very crucial.

This is important, as to remain focused we need to be guided by our values and beliefs. We cannot allow emotions to influence our beliefs and values (Family 8.)

- Drawing on religious beliefs

Like a value system that is anchored on integrity, honesty and faith in God, two of the participants indicated drawing on their religious beliefs to guide their direction.

Being of Hindu belief, what we are enduring on earth now is our karmic debt of the past birth, not this birth, this helps us to endure what is ordained for us, rather than to build up more karmic debt (Family 3).

During the difficult moments, the family used the readings from the Books of Psalms, and Proverbs as coping mechanisms. These words of God strengthened us and made us excel at the point of distress (Family 7).

Additionally, the belief in ones` self was discovered to be crucial in managing hurdles and disappointment.

We believe in ourselves. This gives us the confidence to pursue our goals, despite unforeseen hurdles (Family 2).

Subtheme 4: Prayer, meditation, and/or quiet personal reflection regularly on life

It appeared from the narratives that prayer, reflection and self-reflection were at the centre of spirituality. Mindfulness-based treatments such as reflection and self-reflection have actually been revealed to have favourable impacts on mental wellness and to some extent spiritual health (Erisman & Roemer, 2010). The value of petition, reflection, and/or peaceful individual representation on the life of the individuals were acknowledged by participants.

As posited in literary works, reflection might aid to regulate psychological actions under unfavourable stimulations (Erisman & Roemer, 2010). This is supported by a few of the individuals, who revealed that reflection kept them relaxed when taking care of stress and anxiety. Such reflection was observed through meditation in some cases.

Meditation- this helps us to keep calm, be hopeful that no challenge is insurmountable, and moulded us into true and sincere individuals (Family 1).

To avoid the mind overthinking subconsciously, breathing exercises and meditation allow the body to relax and be mindful of the challenges. It is helpful in remaining calm and dealing with the stress in appropriate ways, rather than losing control of oneself (Family 3).

...weekend meditations gave us inner strength from time to time during the pandemic (Family 7).

According to Lutz et al. (2008), mindfulness reflection can be mapped to Vipassana, which is a Buddhist reflection strategy. This strategy claims to influence psychological occasions by involving in a details interest collection. From the declaration of the individual standing for family 9, one can extract that Buddhist reflections assisted throughout the pandemic.

Daily chanting, meditation and Buddhist rituals helped (Family 9).

Some of the families noted that reflection helped in constructing mindfulness, and recognising blind spots.

Reflection helps in building mindfulness and making ourselves better individuals (Family 10).

Self-reflection is the best exercise for identifying our blind spots, working on our weaknesses and finding solutions to move forward (Family 4).

The methods some of the families used to reflect was reading through inspirational books.

...we read daily be it inspirational books or daily devotionals from websites. It helps us to reflect and connect with our values and purpose in life (Family 1).

Research has actually revealed that passion rises during catastrophes (Sinding-Bentzen, 2019; Auriol et al., 2020). According to Thunstrom and Noy (2022 ), spiritual involvement with comradery or routines such as petitions is viewed as a useful strategy in tough times. For example, praying creates psychological convenience (Belding et al., 2010; Anderson & Nunnelley, 2016). Given the advantages of petitions to health, it was, for that reason, vital to understand exactly how frequently the individuals took part in prayers. It was revealed that while some participated in routine petitions, others prayed periodically.

Yes, every day and some of the times, more than once a day (Family 11).

Prayer and meditation have been regular family practices. It has influenced the way we think, and interact with others, increased emotional awareness, strengthened family relations, and shaped our good habits (Family 2).

From family 2 , one can argue that praying frequently raised the household's psychological health. Thunstrom and Noy (2022) suggested that individuals anticipate praying to bring psychological wellbeing to them. An individual from the family suggested that the household prayed two times a day. From the statement below, one might draw out that petitions ensured the household remained rooted in their beliefs, therefore recommending the significance of praying in spiritual routines.

...praying twice a day as a couple, and sometimes during online sessions, kept us rooted in our faith and our purpose in life. We always believe that prayer complemented by doing good and being good is a ticket to a fulfilling life (Family 1).

Prayer was likewise noticed to lead to enhanced wellness. This might explain why family 10 took part in prayers three times daily.

We have resorted to praying at least three times a day. Through prayer and our spiritual practices, we have become aware of the need to live according to our strong value systems, not become selfish and share the pain of those who are suffering through whatever support we can offer (Family 10).

For some, like family 7, the family prayed occasionally. The reason for this was not elaborated on in the interview.

Family prayers are occasionally led by me, or my aged mother (Family 7).

Concisely, the above narratives suggest the influence of prayers, meditation and reflections on the well-being of the interviewed families, particularly their emotional wellness and moral behaviour. The statements below further corroborate this.

Prayer, meditation, and/or quiet personal reflection regularly are amongst the key approaches for a preventive and curative solution regarding stress and the frustrations of life (Family 5).

Activities like prayer, meditation and personal reflections were intense as we reflected and looked upon them for solace (Family 6).

Continued with prayer, meditation, and/or quiet personal reflection, as the pandemic gave us a sense of purpose, meaning and direction, rather than just giving up on life (Family 9).

Proof from the study of cognitive neuroscience recommends that lasting reflection meditation reduces the response strength of the free nerves (Vasquez-Rosati et al., 2017). This likewise was discovered to undermine the neural reactions to psychological stimulations (Sobolewski et al., 2011; Taylor et al., 2011). One can effectively recommend that prayer, reflection, as well as prayers produce favourable results on a person's spiritual wellness.

#### Subtheme 5: Continuing to find meaning and purpose in life

While the influences of the pandemic have been felt in every element of life, it deserved recognizing exactly how the families maintained purpose and meaning in life; and

also drive in life when faced with the adverse scenario around them. From the interviews, the following emerged:

- Spiritual practices

Several of the families maintained that their spiritual methods assisted them to discover sense and also drive in life. An individual from family 11 noted that observing the household traditional customs added value to their life experience.

God gives us life purpose. Observing our oral traditions added value to our life's journey (Family 11).

Similarly, aligning up to the Jewish faith, for example, was considered valuable in locating sense, as well as tenacity in life.

Despite the trauma of the pandemic, we believe in maintaining a life of good health, and happiness. This was made possible by our spiritual consciousness aligned to our Jewish faith (Family 2).

As highlighted below, some of the family members got involved in methods such as prayer sessions, fasting, reviewing divine publications, as well as genealogical praises to locate meaning and objective in life.

Yes, with regular prayer sessions, fasting, and ancestral worship, we remained hopeful of a better tomorrow (Family 7).

Having strong beliefs such as we our god's blessings and beloved, taking time to have silence during repeating holy verses, and that we are gifted to be still alive and healthy gives us the stimulation that life has meaning and needs to fulfil our purpose in life (Family 8).

As Buddhists, we that the human life is one of suffering, and that meditation, spiritual and physical labour and good behaviour are the ways to achieve enlightenment or nirvana. Through our Buddhist practices, we understand the purpose of life and our journey, so we live our lives toward eventual transcendental freedom (Family 9).

The above comments sustain the assertion that religiosity as well as spirituality enhances a person's values, ideas, behaviours, and also identification, which might concentrate on either spiritual or the useful facets of faith (Villani et al., 2019). Iannello et al. (2019) operationalised worship as ideas and techniques connected with a certain spiritual worldview and area. From the above, one might



extract that several of the individuals continued to worship to discover significance and drive in life.

- Optimism

Positive outlook which suggests remaining in favourable assumptions regarding the future is thought about in connection with feelings, determination, analytical; scholastic, sportive, military, employment as well as political accomplishments. Hence, it is also essential in preserving well-being (Yang et al., 2016). A solid feeling of positive outlook was crucial to maintaining definition and objectives in life for the family 5.

It requires a strong sense of optimism and faith in the future in order to continue to find meaning and purpose in life (Family 5).

Subtheme 6: Drawing on the beliefs and values of others to give direction

In this phase, it was highlighted that ideas and value systems direct some of the interviewed families. In view of the impact of social media; as well as loved ones in spreading out the influences of the pandemic, it was hence worth understanding if the household made use of the ideas and values of others to offer direction. The following was revealed:

- Motivated by the experiences of others

A few of the individuals mentioned getting instructions from various other testaments. The individual from family 10 stated that testaments from others encouraged them to relocate in the appropriate direction.

It is through the sharing of testimonies from others that we are given hope that indeed God is the divide protector. Learning the good from others is empowering and provides guidance to move in the right direction (Family 10).

Much more, the common experiences of others such as the sanitisation, and health methods assisted in offering assistance to a few of the families.

Generally, take the good from others' experiences. Also to share our values and beliefs to give others direction (Family 12).

The support of others to give direction is also very important. The beliefs and values, as well as their

experience relating to life issues, may help solve or restore wellness on issues affecting life (Family 5).

The beliefs and values of others such as homemade healing remedies, sanitisation, hygiene, church sermons and talking to others provided direction (Family 6).

- Grounded on own value systems

Here, some of the individuals stated that their ideas and value systems were rooted in their own beliefs and therefore, could not be affected by the ideas and values of others.

We believe that God is the author of our lives, and others can advise but cannot direct our lives. We respect beliefs, which are contrary to ours, but we are grounded in our value system, which has commonality with others (Family 11).

We remained steadfast in our beliefs and value systems but were respectful of others (Family 7).

We are quite firm in our Buddhist belief system but do not condemn others who have different value systems. Buddhism shares a lot of commonality with other followings such as Hinduism, hence our value systems point us in the direction of escaping from suffering by doing good actions to guide us toward perfection (Family 9).

From the above narratives, a repeating pattern is the individuals' regard for others' value systems in spite of the strong belief in their own values. This might be related to the common communal value systems, such as Buddhism and Hinduism mentioned in the declaration from family 9 members.

- Open-minded and respectful

The regard for various ideas of others may have affected the receptivity of some of the families in directing their ways.

We are open and respectful of others' beliefs. We avoid being judged and are ready to learn from others if it adds value to our lives (Family 2).

Difficult to draw on others' beliefs and values, as we may not necessarily concur with them. We remain open to listening to their perspectives, drawing lessons from their experiences and looking at how we can improve our value systems (Family 3).

While our value system is important for some kind of grounding, we are open to learning from others if there are benefits accruing (Family 4).

The above narratives suggest that regardless of the distinctions in value systems from others, a few of the individuals revealed the value of drawing benefits from other value systems. It therefore indicates that despite the spiritual distinctions as well as value systems, one can acquire experience and also adjust to various ideas of others, if they view them as beneficial for improving their very own systems.

#### Subtheme 7: Ability to be optimistic and have faith in the future

Positive outlook implies remaining in favourable assumptions concerning the capability to be confident, and also believing in the future, and keeping well (Yang, Zhang & Kou, 2016).). From the interviews, the following were revealed:

My faith has been elevated, being optimistic provides hope that things will brighten up (Family 11).

We are hopeful that things will change, we must remain optimistic about retrieving our lost bliss and happiness (Family 2).

We are confident that there is always light at the end of the tunnel (Family 3).

We believe that sometime in the future this COVID-19 pandemic will come to pass. Remaining optimistic and faithful makes us look forward to a bright future with new opportunities (Family 10).

Positive outlook, hope, and self-confidence reveal favourable sensations regarding the future (Yang et al., 2016).). The views listed below can be analysed as individuals having favourable sentiments regarding their future, regardless of the pandemic problems. The above-shared positive outlook, hope, as well as self-confidence might be attached to the interviewees' degree of spirituality. Some of them emphasised the relevance of their spirituality offering them real hope as well as positive outlook for the future.

Such as indicated earlier, optimism and faith in God are approaches to overcoming stress and the frustrations of life; and remaining optimistic about a blissful future (Family 5).

As earlier mentioned, the regular prayer sessions gave us lots of hope and optimism for our future. These prayer sessions moved us from strength to strength (Family 7). We believe that the universe is a product of karma; our bad actions will invoke suffering. We remain optimistic and faithful, as we believe in good karma (Family 9). More so, the connection shared with others was vital in having hope for the future.

Optimism was partially blurred by unexpected deaths from COVID-19. But prayer and staying connected to others diminished a sense of permanent doom and bleakness (Family 6).

Similarly, the above story agrees with the assertion that wish is most effective when it depends upon important targets that have modest opportunity to achieve, and does not necessarily align to barriers (Kardash et al., 2019). This is noticeable in the declaration of the individual from family 8.

COVID-19 had created a sense of fear about the uncertainty in the future. But being hopeful things will change, helps to alleviate some of the despondency and feelings of gloom and doom (Family 8).

Faith helped to improve self-confidence or trust. Having confidence that the pandemic will certainly go away was substantial. Two of the individuals' declarations listed below additionally sustained this assertion.

Having lived well into our 70s, our faith that we can resolve problems, live harmoniously is honest and truthful in our actions helped us (Family 1).

The good and the bad experiences during the pandemic gave us the faith and optimism that life is not perfect, and that with change comes a better life (Family 12).

Subtheme 8: Capability to value all-natural pressures that exist in deep space  
Naturalism is a thoughtful concept whose centre conviction is the recognition of nature. People with biologist knowledge have a level of sensitivity, as well as admiration for nature (Sadiku et al., 2020). Many of the participants valued the role of all-natural forces in deep spaces.

The forces of nature have their roles to play. Our spiritual connectedness is not only on earth but also with the universe. While god is all around us, we also believe that the movements of the sun and moon also affect what

happens to us. So need to be more aware of such forces so that we can respond in appropriate ways (Family 1).

The natural forces have a purpose in our lives; hence, we should appreciate their values to us as human beings (Family 10).

Very grateful and appreciative of the value and power of nature. We need to recognise that the forces of nature have a purpose and should not be interfered with, as they are also living objects connected to us (Family 12).

We believe that the natural world be it water, the sun or the moon has a role to play. Hence, respecting the natural world and using the power of nature to our benefit such as healing us is important (Family 2).

The functions the natural pressures play can additionally be important in the recovery procedure, and can hence assist in discussing why a few of the families valued its duty in deep space. According to the opinions of the individual from household 3, a natural pressure like the moon has recovery powers.

Every day it more and more evident that natural forces exist in the universe so definitely. We read the astrology charts of various healers, which show the impact of natural forces like the full moon (Family 3).

Another individual also validated the above belief by suggesting the following:

An appreciation of the natural forces that exist in the universe (Divine intervention, Divine healing, Divine direction) helps to create a sustainable wellness atmosphere imbued with hope for change and transformation from a situation of crisis (Family 5).

It hence implies that natural pressures such as the heat from the sunlight, moving water, as well as the noise of waves have powers, which is an essential astrological idea (Sadiku et al., 2020).

Value the energy from nature like the sound of waves, flowing water, and the warmth from the sun. we believe in the power of astrology, so we observe full moon occurrences and the movement of the planets to manage our journey in life (Family 4).

We cannot dispel the purpose of the natural forces. Appreciating fresh air, the heat from the sun, shade from the trees, and rain to revive our gardens are important as nature adds value to our lives (Family 8).

According to Sadiku et al. (2020) people with high naturalistic knowledge reveal a good disposition towards

the environment. Simply put, people with naturalistic knowledge have good perspectives and practices towards the natural surroundings consisting of plants as well as pets. The declaration listed below recommends that a few of the individuals have high naturalistic knowledge as a result of their respect for nature.

We believe that all natural objects are living objects, and as humans, we are connected to all living objects. Hence, our reverence for nature remains unhampered. As a moral obligation, we treat animals, plants and landforms with respect (Family 11). Our quest for enlightenment guides us in conserving natural forces. Nature is a spiritual force; therefore, it should not be tampered with (Family 9).

While some believed that the COVID-19 outbreak had a natural link, one individual emphatically differed, by mentioning the following:

The natural forces did not cause COVID-19. The natural forces are powerful entities on their own and must be respected (Family 6).

Subtheme 9: Ability to feel continued gratitude for the good things in life

When asked if the individuals and their family members were grateful for the advantages in life, there was a basic agreement in their views that they were grateful for things they have in their life. For example, some of them were appreciative that they were still active, healthy and balanced, have sanctuary, and also can pay their expenses.

In assessing what was happening around us, we were grateful that we still had a shelter over our heads, income to pay our bills and that we were still alive. Appreciating being alive was our greatest consolation (Family 1).

We count our blessings every day, simple things like being able to breathe, eat and walk are no longer taken for granted due to our experiences with family and friends during the pandemic (Family 11).

Became more grateful for the simple things in life, which cannot be taken for granted. Being alive, safe and healthy are precious good things in life (Family 12).

An additional reason for appreciation besides living and having sanctuary over one's head is that household unity throughout this pandemic was crucial.

We appreciate every day, waking up alive and having a family that is well bonded is the greatest token of gratitude (Family 10).

Previous research have actually found a favourable relationship between appreciation, life, and contentment (Robustelli & Whisman, 2018; Yang et al., 2016) and also a favourable connection between thankfulness, hope, and joy (Witvliet et al., 2019). Hence, one can appropriately presume that appreciation affected satisfaction and also contentment. This is sustained by the assertion listed below.

Every person has infinite worth and we should value those we encounter in life. Appreciate those dear to us, appreciate good health and do not become obsessively absorbed by the material things in life (Family 2).

As such, being grateful can be effective therapy during the pandemic.

Feeling gratitude for the good things in life produces an appreciation of continual divine favour and grace that good things will happen in life. Having gratitude is part of healing from trauma caused by the pandemic (Family 5).

## **Theme 2: Pathways to the management of spiritual wellness during COVID-19**

While there is no question that the COVID-19 pandemic adversely influenced the general spiritual health of the populace worldwide, which was increased by the closure of the spiritual organisations, some of the participants in the study shared a positive outlook, hope and self-confidence in getting rid of the pandemic. More so, given the difficulties of the lockdown and closure of organisations that functioned as places for spiritual assistance, this subtheme examined how individuals and their families rebuilt their spiritual health throughout the pandemic.

### **Subtheme 1: Participating in digital spiritual tasks**

Singarimum (2021) noted that the fostering of innovative means of interaction emerged as a popular and new approach for spiritual establishments throughout the pandemic, which spiritual bodies utilized in developing networks for their parishes. Hence, electronic media was made use of to provide spiritual web content and also digital communities for participants to take part in real-

time systems such as YouTube Livestream programmes. From the interviews, many individuals suggested proceeding with their spiritual tasks via on-line digital solutions.

We had family prayers, virtual prayers with family and friends who were sick, or emotionally afflicted, and shared the word of God online as a church (Family 6).

Online church services, regular family prayers, chanting verses. We have always believed that we should pray in good and bad times. Hence, our faith was undeterred. Our faith in God and the power of the universe became stronger (Family 10).

We maintained our faith and watch online church services and programs on TV

(Family 4).

Expanding on the above, it was discovered that electronic systems such as WhatsApp, Facebook as well as YouTube were the media of selection in on-line spiritual tasks.

Online worship on WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube. Continuing with our oral traditions (Family 11).

Apart from digital solutions some family members exposed how they enjoyed spiritual videos to rebuild their spiritual health.

We also shared our readings, videos and websites, which kept our spirits running high (Family 1).

Continued with prayer, meditation, lighting candles with calming fragrances, and listening to spiritual videos (Family 12).

We continued with our prayer from home, recited our mantras and regularly watched videos of Sadhguru, a world-renowned sage (Family 3).

#### Subtheme 2: Keeping a positive spirit

Three of the participants shared that to rebuild or handle their spiritual health, the household maintained a favourable spirit as well as ideas.

We ensured that we remained positive in our interactions (Family 1).

My parents focus on positive thinking and awareness that a higher force exists (Family 3).

For each day we survived, gave us gratitude; whilst we cherished our existence (Family 7).



### Subtheme 3: Motivating others

Encouraging others through motivation and showing compassion to others were important in taking care of spiritual health according to the statement of two of the participants.

We provided motivation and encouragement to those who were in distress (Family 1).

We Showed love and empathy toward others (Family 2).

### Subtheme 4: Yoga and meditation

The relevance of reflection as well as its importance in recovery has been widely recognised in literature (Villani et al. 2019). It was additionally revealed that a few of the individuals handled their spiritual health with meditation and yoga exercise methods.

We maintained our spiritual well-being mainly by engaging in meditation, practising yoga, and ancestral offerings (Family 7).

Meditation once in a while; prayer, reading and practising holistic living based on a strong value system (Family 8).

Attended live streaming empowerment classes; followed pre-recorded meditation classes, and did yoga as a family at home (Family 9).

## **Theme 3: Recommended changes to spiritual wellness**

Spirituality and religiosity were reported to positively influence subjective well-being (Villani et al. 2019). Given some of the negative effects of the pandemic on the spiritual wellness indicated in this study, this subtheme explored from the perspective of the interviewees, the recommended changes to spiritual wellness for themselves and their families. From the interviews, the following were recommended:

### Subtheme 1: Retreats

Many of the participants proposed going away for spiritual retreats. This may be connected to the fact that such retreats can afford individuals intimate time to meditate with little or no distraction.

Go away on retreats (Family 1).

Make spiritual retreats a regular routine in our lives (Family 10).

Expand our spiritual practices by going on retreats (Family 12).

Attend a Buddhist retreat as a family, read more about Buddhist practices, and go on a pilgrimage to Tibet (Family 9).

#### Subtheme 2: Engaging in yoga and meditation

Research evidence provided by Sahni et al. (2020) revealed that yoga was an effective self-management strategy to cope with stress, anxiety and depression, and maintain wellbeing during COVID-19 lockdown. This view was supported by some of the participants who recommended yoga as a way of reconstructing their spiritual wellness.

Engage in basic yoga (Family 1).

To make more time to try and make time for self-awareness, more yoga and meditation (Family 3).

.. practising yoga, ancestral worship (Family 7).

Improve on our yoga practices, especially mindful breathing (Family 8).

#### Subtheme 3: Engaging with others

Under this subtheme, it was stated that shared testimonies from others and their experiences provided some direction during the pandemic. Hence, some of the participants recommended engaging with others to learn from them on spiritual practices.

Engage with more people, to not only learn from them on spiritual practices but to create more awareness of the importance of spiritual wellbeing. Shared experiences are value-adding for all (Family 1).

Join an online spiritual chat group/blog to deepen our understanding of spirituality (Family 10).

Learn about different organisations or groups in my community and decide which ones are the best fit for me for alternate spiritual practices. Consult and seek help from elders and those who have experience and spiritual wisdom for counselling and solution to their own spiritual crisis (Family 5).

#### Subtheme 4: Visiting sacred sites/ traditional feasts

Visiting sacred sites/ traditional feasts were proposed as a way may of reconstructing spiritual wellness.

Visit more sacred sites. Engage in more traditional feasts (Family 11).

## 9. DISCUSSION

9.1. The effect of COVID-19 on the spiritual wellness dimension within families transitioning through the COVID-19 pandemic and the nature of constraints experienced

The importance of spiritual wellness has been recognized in the relationship between spirituality and a more attractive understanding of well-being; and natural and psychic health (Coppola et al. 2021). Nevertheless, the global spread of COVID-19 created a whole plethora of miserable and devastating effects on people's health. Part of containment measures implemented in many countries was the closure of public spaces including religious and spiritual institutions. There is extensive evidence that such closures had a profound effect on the spiritual wellness of some of the participants. For example, the closure of religious centres negatively affected relationships with other members of the congregation. This may be attributed to the fact that religious institutions serve as crucial meeting places and reference points for not just the performance of religious functions, but also for socializing. In supporting this argument, Coppola et al. (2021) stated that the closure of religious and spiritual centres, not only impacted spiritual wellness, but also obstructed access to pillars for mutual support such as social and emotional wellness.

Additionally, the deprivation of access to spiritual support structures due to the closure of spiritual centres may have contributed to the feeling of hopelessness and loss of direction among some of the participants. This is corroborated by Durmus and Ozturk (2022), who found the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to loneliness and hopelessness, especially among older adults. Moreover, some of the participants were prohibited by lockdown protocols from visiting religious centres and attending social gatherings to perform prayer and healing rituals. It was also revealed that some could not even attend funerals to offer their last rites. The findings may be connected to the fact that the closure of religious institutions deprived the individuals of a strong supportive community. This is supported by other scholars, who noted that spiritual and religious practices offered purpose and meaning; and constitute a supportive

community (Gray, 2017; DeFranza et al., 2020; Walsh, 2020; Roman et al., 2020).

In many cases, despite the closure of spiritual and religious centres, families turned to online programmes to sustain their spiritual practices. This was reinforced by continuing with their values and belief systems to give them direction and meaning in life; maintaining a spirit of optimism and hope; practicing yoga and meditation; and appreciating the natural forces.

#### 9.2. Spiritual pathways of wellness created within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and recommendations made by families

The COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected the overall spiritual wellness of people worldwide, which was heightened by social isolation and the closure of religious institutions. Despite this, the findings from participants suggested that some of the participants expressed hope, optimism, and confidence in overcoming the pandemic. According to Villani et al. (2019), hope, optimism, and confidence reflect positive feelings about the future. This is thus corroborated by some of the participants that positive feelings about their future, despite the stress and tensions surrounding the pandemic, helped to maintain their spiritual wellness. It was revealed from the data that being hopeful and optimistic about life changing in the future, helped to alleviate some of the despondency; and feelings of gloom and doom experienced by some of the participants. The shared hope, optimism, and confidence may be connected to the interviewees' level of spirituality. For instance, many of the participants acknowledged the influence of meditation, prayers, and reflections on their families' well-being, particularly their emotional wellness. It thus can be inferred that finding solace in spiritual activities may potentially alleviate some of the other wellness challenges as well. This may have also been the reason why some of the participants recommended engaging with others, to learn from and share with them on spiritual practices. Such a desire may have also informed the recommendation for retreats and visits to sacred sites. Several studies have reported the benefits of spiritual retreats offered within Christian, Buddhist, and secular contexts. For example, Ruggiero (2012) found that spiritual retreats provided

opportunities for reflection. This may also be relevant given the trauma, pain, and emotional pain caused by the pandemic. Thus, retreats may afford the participants opportunities for renewal (Chung, Tan, Singau, Pazim, and Mansur, 2020), restoration (Lutz et al., 2008), and healing (Rimé, Bouchat, Paquot and Giglio, 2020).

From the data analysed, many of the participants managed to continue with their spiritual practices during the pandemic, due to digital technology. It was revealed that digital media was used to deliver religious and spiritual content; and form virtual communities that enabled their participation in spiritual programmes in real-time. Further, it was noted that many of the participants engaged in regular prayers during the pandemic, which helped to keep the family rooted in their faith. This may be connected to Thunstrom and Noy's (2022) argument, that people expect the act of praying to imbue emotional comfort to the person who prays. As such, praying, is considered to generate emotional comfort (Belding et al., 2010; Anderson and Nunnolley, 2016).

Moreover, research evidence points to spirituality having an immediate connection with individual prosperity, just as practices such as meditation are adopted during sicknesses and other upsetting life changes (Krout, 2007). Mindfulness-based interventions such as meditation and self-reflection have previously been shown to have positive effects on psychological well-being, and to an extent spiritual wellness (Erisman and Roemer, 2010). This may also help to explain why some of the participants managed their spiritual wellness through meditation and yoga practice. This resonates with the argument by Sahni et al. (2020), that yoga is an effective self-management strategy to cope with stress, anxiety, and depression; while maintaining wellness during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was thus recommended as a way of managing spiritual wellness during the pandemic. More so, keeping a positive spirit, motivating others through encouragement, and showing empathy towards others were critical in managing spiritual wellness according to the participants. Additionally, further recommendations made by families regarding spiritual wellness included retreats; engaging in yoga and meditation; and engaging with others.

## **10. CONCLUSION**

The findings of this research revealed that COVID-19 had an adverse influence on the spiritual health of the families. This unswervingly triggered some restraints on the regular life of the individuals and their immediate family members. While all of the families had a strong spiritual background, the study conclusively suggests that the deprivation of support structures by the way of closure of spiritual centres contributed to the feeling of hopelessness and loss of direction among some of the participants. Mindfulness-based interventions such as meditation and self-reflection were reported to have positive effects on psychological well-being and to an extent spiritual wellness. Therefore, the practice of yoga and meditation, respecting the natural forces, and remaining hopeful were considered important when it came to spiritual wellness. Other recommendations made by families regarding spiritual wellness included retreats, visiting sacred sites, participating in traditional feasts, and engaging with others on spiritual aspects. This study envisages that such practices would lead to stronger family bonding as well.

Finally, a family-centric wellness framework is recommended as a measure of achieving and supporting family wellness. The framework supports interconnectivity among the various dimensions of wellness, which does mean that the failure to achieve any one of the wellness dimensions would potentially negatively impact the rest. At the centre of the framework is the family structure and support system. It thus means that the nature of the family support system and relationships among family members directly impacts their wellness. This is because the family unit is critical in ensuring work balance; environmental wellness; and emotional and physical wellness among others. Thus, a cohesive family unit is at the centre for an individual and the family to reconstruct their wellness.

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