

A Qualitative Study on the in-depth Experiences of Spiritual Well-being and its Role on Psychological Well-being among Novice Clergy and Senior Priests in Myanmar

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the in-depth experiences of spiritual well-being and its role on psychological well-being among clergy. In particular, the study looked into the lived-experiences of spiritual well-being through the quality of relationship one has within each component of spiritual well-being and its role on psychological well-being among novice clergy and senior priests because novice clergy and senior priests are the most important stages in priestly life. There is a big difference between these two groups in terms of number of years in priestly life, year of ordination, age and occupation. In order to achieve breadth and depth in the understanding of this phenomenon, the researcher adopted a qualitative approach to examine the in-depth experiences of spiritual well-being and its role on psychological well-being among clergy. Twenty clergy (10 novice clergy and 10 senior priests), who expressed their willingness to participate, were selected for in-depth interviews. The findings specifically showed that the experience of spiritual well-being within the personal components benefits personal growth, environmental control, self-acceptance, purpose in life and emotional stability among the novice clergy. The experience of spiritual well-being in environmental component, on the other hand, benefits peace of mind, self-acceptance and others-acceptance, increased ability of problem solving skills, increased happiness and a better physical health among senior priests.

Keywords: Spiritual well-being, Psychological well-being, Clergy, Novice, Senior, Interview

INTRODUCTION

The concept of psychological well-being is becoming increasingly important in today's society, encompassing physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions (Noronha & Barganza, 2021). Spirituality is seen as a means to pursue happiness with religious individuals believing that connecting with God is a key to achieving fulfilment (Corwin, 2014). Spiritual well-being is a measure of one's spiritual health reflecting the quality of relationships with oneself, others, the environment, and the transcendent. It is considered a critical component of overall well-being, alongside mental, physical, and emotional health with a positive impact on adaptation, healthy behaviors, life satisfaction, and quality of life (Mudge, 2021).

Spiritual well-being plays a vital role in stress management and is strongly correlated with happiness (James Cin Len Khai, Ma. Lourdes C. Medina, 2024). Studies showed that specific domains of spiritual well-being are associated with happiness, with personal and communal domains being positively correlated with

happiness (Shahoo Feizi, Morteza Nasiri, Hanieh Bahadori, Meysam Hosseini Amiri, Hamid Mirhosseini (2020). However, the transcendental and environmental domains may not have the same impact on happiness in certain groups or circumstances (Agnieszka Bożek, Paweł F. Nowak, Mateusz Blukacz (2020). The relationship between spiritual well-being and happiness is consistent among religious individuals with factors such as self-worth, social support, and connection with God contributing to psychological well-being and happiness (Shirzad et. al., 2020). Clergy and priests face unique challenges in maintaining their well-being including stress, burnout, and mental health issues, highlighting the importance of managing stress and prioritizing mental health (Ley, 2022).

Therefore, this study investigated specific component of spiritual well-being that is most indicative of the psychological well-being among clergy from different priestly stages, namely novice (newly ordained) clergy and senior priests. In general, there are five different stages of priestly life known as aspirant, seminarian, deacon, novice (newly ordained) clergy and senior priest. The participants chosen for this study were novice clergy and senior priests for the following fundamental reasons. Since the novice clergy and senior priests are different from one another in terms of their psychological development, career development and vocational development, it is proposed that these differences lead to difference in terms of how they experience spiritual well-being and its role on their psychological well-being as well.

This study explored in greater depth how the clergy experienced spiritual well-being, and the differences between novice clergy and senior priests in terms of the role played by spiritual well-being in their psychological well-being. The present study hopes to achieve breadth and depth in the understanding of this phenomenon. It also hopes to contribute to the literature on spiritual health. Secondly, being a catholic priest and a counselor, the researcher hopes that this study would help him deepen his knowledge of the role of spiritual well-being in psychological well-being among clergy so that he might help them become more aware of the state of their spiritual well-being and how their spiritual life experiences influence their psychological well-being. This research was for some priests the first time they experienced as participants, and there were some risks when they underwent interview. There were a kind of psychological risks such as emotional discomfort, anxiety, and inconvenience to participating in the interview.

METHODS

The study adopted a qualitative approach to examine the in-depth experiences of spiritual well-being and psychological well-being among clergy. The study involved a case study design to explore the depths of a person's world view on spiritual well-being. Most studies on spiritual well-being have focused on quantitative methods but the qualitative approach allowed for a more collaborative and in-depth analysis. Aligning with the qualitative analysis, the study focused on in-depth interview with 20 clergy: 10 novice clergy and 10 senior priests who expressed their willingness to participate in the interview. The selected participants were novice clergy and senior priests because novice clergy and senior priests are the most important stages in priestly life. There is a big difference between these two groups in terms of number of years in priestly life, year of ordination, age and occupation. The research was conducted under the ethical oversight of the UST Graduate School Ethical Review Committee with necessary permissions and informed consent obtained from participants ensuring confidentiality and respect throughout the study. The study spanned eight Catholic dioceses in Myanmar notable for their significant clergy populations.

The case study design provided a deeper understanding of how the four components of spiritual well-being influence psychological well-being among clergy as well as the differences between novice clergy and senior priests. By examining individual perspectives in a specific context, the researcher was able to uncover the meanings embedded within the participants' experiences. The approach made the findings more applicable to everyday life in various cultures.

Participants

The study focuses typically in-depth on a relatively small sample, even on single cases ($n = 1$) purposefully selected. It all depends on the purpose of the study. As the purpose of the present study is to explore the in-depth experiences of spiritual well-being and psychological well-being of each priest and its benefits, 20 priests (10 from the novice clergy and 10 from the senior priests group) were selected from those who expressed their willingness to participate in the interview. The study used purposive sampling to choose participants based on the following criteria: the participants included novice clergy and senior priests in Myanmar aged between 20-30 and 40-65 respectively. Novice clergy were within 5 years of priestly ministry while senior priests had at least 15 years of experience in their ministry. The study focused on priests from 8 Catholic dioceses which have bigger population of ordained priests. Purposive sampling helped researchers gather information from specific subsets of the population relevant to the study.

Instrument

Interview Guide

The study used individual in-depth interview utilizing interview guide among the participants to capture the in-depth experiences of spiritual well-being and its role on psychological well-being among clergy. The interview guide was validated by an expert psychologist. The use of in-depth interviewing is a powerful way to gain insight into educational and other important data through understanding the participants, whose lives reflect those issues. As a method of inquiry, individual in-depth interviewing was most consistent with people's ability to make meaning through language. It affirms the importance of the individual without denigrating the possibility of community and collaboration. Finally, it was deeply satisfying to researchers who are interested in others' stories. Interviewing provides access to the context of people's behaviour and thereby provides a way for researchers to understand the meaning of that behaviour (Creswell, 2014). A basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meanings people make of their experiences affect the way they carry out that experience.

Data gathering

Based on Creswell (2014), the following steps were carefully observed in the process of data collection of the study. First, the 20 priests, selected for interview, who met the standard criteria: the interviewees who came from the participants of the novice clergy considered personal spiritual well-being as the most important in their psychological well-being and the senior priests who considered environmental spiritual well-being as the most important in their psychological well-being; and the interviewees who came from the eight selected dioceses. Second, information gathered through one-to-one interview was audio-taped. Each interview took around one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes. The same sequence of questions was asked in each case. After each interview, the audiotape containing of the personal responses of the participants was securely stored for transcript purposes. This information was documented. The researcher established a protocol for recording the information obtained.

When all the data had been collected, the write-up of findings was done. Based on Creswell (2014) and Guest et al. (2012), the following steps were observed through data analysis procedure: first, when an interview had done, the researcher analysed that interview and wrote memos that may ultimately be included as a narrative in the final report. Secondly, since the amount of information obtained was so extensive, the researcher "winnowed" the data. Third, the researcher classified the data into a small number of themes. By doing this, a cross analysis was carried out to identify commonalities and differences among the participants or establish a consensus regarding the themes identified. This work was done by a group, consisting of the researcher and other two judges including one registered psychologist. Finally the auditor

checked the results of the analysis.

Cross case analysis included responses obtained from interview that highlighted the experiences of the clergy. Cross case study analysis searched for themes that emerged as being important to the description of the event. The process involved the identification of themes and forming of pattern recognition within the data, where emerging themes became the categories for analysis. These data and their interpretations were scrutinized for underlying themes and other patterns that characterized this study more broadly than a single piece of information could. Conclusions were drawn that have implications beyond the specific case that had been studied.

Results of Cross-case Analyses

The purpose of cross-case analyses was to analyse the results of the data. The data was categorized according to theme and subtheme. The analysis of the data would begin with the themes, subthemes, frequency and quotations from participants are presented. This was followed by a detailed discussion of each theme.

I. Experiencing Personal Spiritual Well-being reported by the Novice Clergy

The study set out to explore how the participants describe their experience of personal spiritual well-being or, in other words, what personal spiritual well-being meant for them and how they experienced it. Five main themes emerged from the novice clergy experience of spiritual well-being within personal component. These were drawn from in-depth interviews during which the novice clergy equated personal spiritual well-being with (1) inner harmony, (2) a sense of identity, (3) an awareness of their own inner resources, (4) a sense of meaning in life and (5) self-esteem.

Experiencing Personal Spiritual Well-being reported by the Novice Clergy

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency	Exemplars
Harmony with self	Feeling at peace with oneself	Typical	“I feel good about myself every time I am able to feel at peace with myself.”
	Contentment with self	Variant	“My experience is that I feel content with who I am and what I have.”
	Feeling in tune with personal need	Variant	“In order to live happily, I need to feel that my needs are being satisfied and that somehow I can experience that in my life.”
	Self-acceptance	Typical	“To be aware of who I am and to be able to accept it...”
Sense of identity	Sense of individual Identity	Variant	“I am beginning to appreciate who I am as I am becoming more aware of my uniqueness in the eyes of God.”
	Sense of group identity	Variant	“For me I feel good about myself when I am experiencing and sharing the values of the group to which I belong.”

An awareness of inner resources	Experiencing personal values	Typical	“Personal spiritual well-being for me means recognizing my inner personal values such as love and compassion.”
	Experiencing inner strength	Typical	“Personal spiritual well-being for me means experiencing the inner strength which helps me to overcome the obstacles in my life.”
Sense of meaning	Having a sense of meaning in vocation	Typical	“Personal spiritual well-being for me means finding meaning in my vocation.”
	Having a clear sense of meaning in my daily work	Variant	“Although life in the parish is simple, I feel good about myself when find meaning in everything I do.”
Experience of self-esteem		Typical	“Personal spiritual well-being for me means being able to feel good about myself and to appreciate my own worth.”

N= 10; General = 9 – 10 cases; Typical = 6 – 8 cases; Variant = 2 – 5 cases

Theme 1. Harmony with self

As reported by participants, this subtheme appeared to be a strong experience of relationship with oneself. Out of 10 novice clergy, eight equated harmonious relationship with oneself with the feeling of being at peace with themselves. Almost all of them mentioned that peace of mind was an indispensable element for their experience of harmonious relationship with self. Feeling at peace with oneself also meant the experience of inner peace. Those who equated personal spiritual well-being with inner harmony seemed to mean the experience of feeling at peace with themselves. They said they felt good about themselves whenever they had a sense of peace within. When they were able to feel at peace with themselves, they were more easily able to accept themselves because it seemed to them that the feeling of inner peace enabled them to become reconciled with certain personal aspects that they did not like.

Feeling at peace with oneself. As reported by participants, this subtheme appeared to be a strong experience of relationship with oneself. Out of 10 novice clergy, eight equated harmonious relationship with oneself with the feeling of being at peace with themselves. Almost all of them mentioned that peace of mind is an indispensable element for their experience of harmonious relationship with self. Feeling at peace with oneself also meant the experience of inner peace.

Contentment with self. Three novice clergy equated harmonious relationship with self with contentment with self. Since their entry into the seminary, what they had experienced about themselves and about their lives had made them feel content with who they are and what they have. For these novice clergy, contentment with self and the experience of harmonious relationship with self goes together.

Feeling in tune with personal needs. Novice clergy were those who are in the early years of priestly life. They said they would be very happy when their real experience measures up to their ideal or to what they

think are in tune with their needs and daily experience. Out of ten novice clergy, four equated harmonious relationship with self with feeling in tune with their personal needs.

Self-acceptance. Out of 10 novice clergy, six perceived spiritual well-being within the personal component as a state of self-acceptance. In the process of their priestly life, they are becoming more aware of themselves, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, and learning to accept who they are. The novice clergy said that they would be happy when they are able to accept who they are.

Theme 2. The Sense of Identity

For the participants in the current study, the sense of identity covers both individual and group identity, which they equated with personal spiritual well-being. However, twenty percent of the participants, meaning two out of ten participants, equated personal spiritual well-being with the sense of individual identity alone. They stated that recognizing one's own identity led to the experience of being in harmony with oneself. Thus, for them, personal spiritual well-being also meant being aware of one's own identity. In realizing their own uniqueness in the eyes of God, they were better able to appreciate themselves as persons.

Individual Identity. According to three novice clergy, recognizing one's own identity led to the experience of being in harmony with oneself. For them, the experience of harmonious relationship with self also meant 'being aware of one's own identity'. For these participants, they would experience spiritual well-being in personal component when they are able to be aware of who they are.

Group Identity. Besides equating individual identity with personal well-being, the recognition of group identity was also equated with personal spiritual well-being. This is because the values the novice clergy are aware of in the group also affect the way they see and value themselves. For instance, they see that belonging to a spiritual family has helped them to value themselves more.

Theme 3: Awareness of Inner Resources

Sixty percent of the participants said that understanding or experiencing their personal spiritual well-being was equivalent to the awareness of their personal value and inner strength. They stated that they were able to esteem themselves each time they could realize and acknowledge their own personal value. In other words, the more they were able to realize and appreciate their inner resources and their personal gifts of body, mind or heart, the better they felt about themselves. Whenever they could see that their personal actions and behaviour measured up to their personal values, the more they appreciated themselves. This helped them feel more confident in pursuing their ideals. The realization and experience of inner strength was an important factor in preserving inner harmony because their inner strength told them what they need to do and how to do it in order to be happy. Inner strength also enabled them to face and to manage challenging situations and to appreciate the things that they are doing although, as novice clergy, they found life to be full of challenges. These findings are consistent with those of Fisher (1998), who stated that those who experience personal spiritual well-being tended to centralize and value their own inner resources. They would feel wholly self-sufficient if they were able to actualize their personal potential in the pursuit of their inspiration, their purpose and values in life.

Experiencing personal values. More than half of novice clergy equated the experience of harmonious relationship with oneself with the recognition of personal values. According to them, the more you can realize and to acknowledge your own personal values, the better you love yourself, esteem yourself and as it happens, you experience harmonious relationship with self.

Experiencing Inner strength: While some novice clergy experience harmonious relationship with self as the awareness of their personal values and qualities, six others describe it in terms of their experience of

inner strength. The more they are aware of inner strength, the better they are able to live happily and feel successful regardless of the difficulties or challenges they may have to face.

Theme 4. Sense of meaning

Seventy percent of the novice clergy equated personal spiritual well-being with a sense of meaning in life. They spoke of their experience of a real sense of vocation. As novice clergy, they wish to become successful priests in the parish. The parish can be a difficult time when they are challenged to discern and clarify their motives for becoming a successful priest. It can be a process of purification and transformation from a secular to a spiritual motivation through having to face critical and moral choices. That is why these novice clergy said that they felt good about themselves whenever they experienced a real sense of vocation in life. They came to appreciate their priestly life and love it more as they experienced the meaning of their vocation. At the same time, they were able to find meaning in their ordinary daily tasks. These findings imply that the experience of a harmonious relationship with oneself is a crucial element in spiritual well-being. The search for meaning in life is an indispensable spiritual factor in inner harmony.

Having a sense of meaning in vocation. Almost all (7) novice clergy equated the experience of harmonious relationship with self with having a sense of meaning in their vocation. They said they feel good about themselves whenever they can experience a real sense of vocation in life.

Having a clear sense of meaning in daily work. Two out of 10 novice clergy said that a sense of meaning in daily work was the same as having good sense about themselves. Ever since they entered priestly life, they learnt how to find meaning, and in everything they do. In their simple daily tasks, they were able to feel good about themselves, to be content with themselves, and this encourages them to move forward towards their dream of becoming a successful person.

Theme 5. Experiencing self-esteem

Sixty percent of the participants equated experience of self-esteem with personal spiritual well-being. For them the experience of personal spiritual well-being meant trusting themselves and perceiving themselves as having the necessary skills to handle difficult situations, and of being willing to take risks in the face of new challenges together with respect and tolerance of other people. All these elements produced a sense of genuine self-esteem. This finding is supported by those of Fisher (1998), who stated that those who equate self-esteem with personal spiritual well-being tend to focus on the belief in their personal competence and self-worth.

II. Factors influencing personal spiritual well-being reported by the novice clergy

Their relationship with God and with other people as well as their prayer life appears to be significant factors that influence their personal spiritual well-being. Their relationship with God gives them the opportunity to experience peace, joy, meaning and purpose in life, self-esteem, and self-acceptance. In addition, living in parish community with other priests and spending time with others give them a sense of belonging to a spiritual family, which provides the experience of love, encouragement, support and guidance, all of which increase their personal spiritual well-being. A prayerful life through spiritual activity also plays a significant role in their personal well-being because time spent in prayer gives them the opportunity to reflect more on themselves, which helps them in terms of self-awareness, of personal identity and inner strength.

Factors influencing personal spiritual well-being reported by the novice clergy (n = 10)

Sub-themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplars
Connected-ness with God			“Every time I am with God, whether in personal or parish community prayer, I feel peaceful in myself.”
	The experience of Peace	Typical	“I do feel homesick and lonely sometimes, being separated from my family, as is the rule in the parish. Nevertheless, I experience inner joy by being aware of God’s presence in my life.”
	The experience of joy	Variant	
	A sense of purpose and meaning in life	General	“In God I can see my life’s purpose: I have goals to pursue and I am able to find meaning in my daily tasks.”
	The experience of self-esteem	Variant	“I have learnt to know and to believe that God is silently taking care of my life. He knows very well what is going on inside me. With him I am encouraged to keep on going and the demands of life never bring me down.”
The sense of self-acceptance	Typical	“Spending time with God has helped me to identify and accept my flaws so that I can improve as a person.”	
Relation-Ship with other people	The experience of belonging to a spiritual family	Variant	“A sense of belonging to this spiritual family has made me feel more valuable in myself, since we all belong to God’s family.”
	The experience of Guidance	Typical	“Staying in the parish is an advantage for me, because through the guidance of my seniors, I am gradually coming to realize my good qualities. This inspires me a lot in following my vocation.”
	The experience of support and encouragement	Variant	“The experience of encouragement and support from my group-mates and fellow priests gives me hope, joy and peace on my journey because I know that I am not alone.”
Prayer life		Typical	“I really appreciate all our spiritual activities, especially being able to say Mass every day. This enriches my inner strength through listening to the Word of God, which seems to control my thoughts and my actions.”

N = 10; General = 9 – 10 cases; Typical = 6 – 8 cases; Variant = 2 – 5 cases

Theme 1. Connectedness with God

As already noted, the interviewees stated that their relationship with God enhanced their relationship with themselves experienced through inner peace and harmony. This finding is consistent with the previous finding that relationship with God through meditation or nonverbal prayer brings calmness to the body and peace of mind. Happiness is the goal of all human action. Authentic peace can be attained by loving God and other people, motivating the individual to seek to do what is right. Since novice clergy think of God as their significant attachment figure, they feel joyful and happy whenever they spend time with Him and remain in the awareness of His Presence.

The experience of peace. Almost all (7) novice clergy reported that they experience peace through their attachment to God. It came out that their trust in God and their love for Him bring the participants closer to God and enable them to feel peace inside them every time they experience the presence of God in their life. It also came out that almost all participants consider God with their significant attachment figure and peace came along as a result of being with their loved ones.

The experience of joy. Besides the experience of peace, three out of ten novice clergy also mentioned the experience of joy through their connection with God.

A sense of purpose and meaning in life. Almost all participants, nine out of ten novice clergy, claim that their relationship with God has brought them a sense of purpose and meaning in life. The time set aside for prayer and reflection has deepened their relationship with God and enables them to understand their vocation more clearly and experience meaning in their decision and in their daily occupations.

The experience of self-esteem. Four novice clergy mentioned that their relationship with God has helped increase their level of self-esteem. They referred to their capacity to handle difficulty, their willingness to take risks and their enjoyment in opening themselves to new challenges as well as their ability to tolerate other people.

The sense of self-acceptance. Almost all participants, out of 10 novice clergy, seven acknowledged that their relationship with God is a significant source of their self-acceptance. It came out that their relationship with God that enables the priests to address their problems and accept themselves and others.

Theme 2. Relationship with other people

Three themes emerged in connection with the relationship with other people and personal spiritual well-being as reported by the interviewees: (1) the experience of belonging to a spiritual family (2) the experience of being guided and (3) the experience of support and encouragement.

The experience of belonging to a spiritual family. Three novice clergy reported that praying, living and studying together in parish community brought them a sense of belonging to a spiritual family which enhances their sense of identity. They feel much better about themselves and feel inspired to develop their own inner strength and personal qualities to serve people better and to live happily.

The experience of guidance. Six interviewees reported that their experience of guidance has helped them increase their level of personal well-being in the sense that, as novice clergy, they are looking forward to realizing their dream of becoming successful persons and striving to achieve it. Almost all the time, they live in a state of curiosity, wondering about their vocation. As a result, they are still questioning themselves whether priestly life is the right way for them, how they can be sure of their real vocation and whether they would be happy as a priest. The guidance of their brother priests, the education and spiritual direction they are receiving, are helping them become clearer about their vocation, and joy and happiness came as a result.

The experience of support and encouragement. Three novice clergy stated that support and

encouragement from their fellow priests facilitate their personal spiritual well-being, in a sense that they come to know themselves better as they interact with them. The experience of support and encouragement from their fellow priests also gives them a sense of companionship on their journey as they realize that they are not travelling alone but always have someone to share with and to accompany them. This knowledge increases their sense of hope, joy and peace.

Theme 3. Prayer life

In addition to the quality of their relationship with God and with other priests, the novice clergy stated that their prayer life was another significant source of personal spiritual well-being. Sixty percent of them reported that their prayer life played an important role in their personal spiritual well-being because such spiritual activities as saying mass, prayer, meditation, contemplation and personal reflection, bible sharing and reflection on sacred scripture brought them the experience of inner peace and provided the opportunity to reflect more deeply on their own lives. This has helped them in terms of self-awareness and a sense of identity, strengthening their interior life.

III. The benefits of Having Personal Spiritual Well-being for the Novice Clergy

The emerging themes of the benefits of personal spiritual well-being are personal growth, emotional stability, a sense of environmental control, of self-acceptance, the acceptance of other people and a sense of purpose. Almost all these outcomes of personal spiritual well-being, which were reported by the novice clergy, appear in Ryff's (1989) core dimensions in his multidimensional model of psychological well-being. However, the findings of this present study reveal that the ways in which the novice clergy experience psychological well-being expand his original meaning of these core dimensions.

The benefits of Having Personal Spiritual Well-being for the Novice Clergy (n = 10)

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplars
Experiencing personal growth	Sense of maturity	Typical	“When I feel interior peace and contentment, it is easy to keep control of myself and to act according to my age, which in turn leads me to a sense of maturity.”
	A sense of progress	Typical	“Realizing my inner resources makes me feel positive about myself and encourages me to attempt things that I need to do. In this way I feel I am making progress in developing my skills and talents.”
Emotional stability		Typical	“I feel I have become much better at controlling my emotions, because of my experience of inner peace.”
Having a sense of confidence and enjoyment in a new environment		Variant	“When I realize my self- worth and am able to trust myself, I can control my life, since I believe that I am capable of handling whatever happens.”

Sense of self-acceptance	Feeling positive about self	Typical	“I am now able to accept myself better and I have a positive view of myself as I am experiencing significant changes in my behavior.”
	Liking self	Variant	“The more I discover my own potential, the better I trust and like myself.”
A sense of Purpose		Typical	“When I experience peace of mind, it seems easy for me to trust myself. This encourages me to attempt things that will enable me to meet my purpose in life”

N = 10; General = 9 – 10 cases; Typical = 6 – 8 cases; Variant = 2 – 5 cases

Theme 1. Experiencing personal growth

Growth appeared to be one of the significant benefits of personal spiritual well-being experienced by the novice clergy. Personal growth is an on-going realization of personal potential, and the perception of life as “a process of continuous change, challenge and opportunity through which one can grow”. For the novice clergy, personal growth is the awareness of on-going maturity and progress. Maturity for them means acting according to their age as well as the awareness of their on-going physical, emotional and mental development resulting from their experience of personal spiritual well-being. Through their self-knowledge and contentment, the novice clergy enjoy trying things that contribute to their physical, mental and emotional development.

Sense of maturity. Almost all the novice clergy claimed that their experiences of growth were the most significant outcome of personal spiritual well-being. Growth, for these novice clergy, is basically the maturity that they have experienced. Maturity for them means being able to act according to their age, and being aware of their on-going physical, emotional and mental development. Six out of ten reported that personal spiritual well-being results in maturity. Put it differently, the sense of maturity as reported by the participants resulted from their experience of self-awareness, self-contentment, peace, and inner power. For instance, having good perception about themselves allows them to try things that contribute to their physical, mental and emotional development.

A sense of progress. Besides maturity, the sense of progress for the participants is another outcome of personal spiritual well-being. The participants realized that priestly life is giving them opportunities to realize their own potential, to actualize them which in turn lead to the experience of progress in the development of their skills and talents.

Theme 2. Emotional stability

Forty percent of the participants perceived emotional stability as another outcome of their personal spiritual well-being. In other words, the state of being in harmony with themselves helped them feel comfortable with themselves and provided inner peace. This in turn increased their ability to control their emotions and enabled them to remain calm, and free from anger or frustration in trying situations. Thus, they felt in control of their emotions and enjoy emotional stability.

Theme 3. Having a sense of environment control

Another benefit of personal spiritual well-being as reported by the novice clergy is their ability to control their environment. Environmental control or environmental mastery means a person’s capacity to manage

and manipulate his environment. What these novice clergy understood by environmental control is the feeling of confidence and enjoyment in their new environment. They were happy when they could feel at home in the parish. Personal spiritual well-being or the quality of their relationship with themselves plays a significant role in environmental control because the feelings of self-worth, self-esteem and confidence help them live in control of their new surroundings:

Theme 4. Sense of self-acceptance.

For the novice clergy, self-acceptance means feeling positive about self and appreciating oneself. This would appear to be one of the benefits of personal spiritual well-being. Seventy percent of the participants considered feeling positive about self as to be the outcome of personal spiritual well-being. They believed that personal spiritual well-being helps them to be in tune with themselves, thus enabling them to understand themselves.

Feeling positive about self. Personal spiritual well-being helps them to be well-connected with themselves. Thus, they were better able to understand themselves. In other words, the better they know themselves, the sooner they will be able to recognize their good qualities, and this will help them feel positive about themselves, to love and accept their own characteristics and temperament. This does not mean encouraging perfectionism but simply appreciation and contentment in their own individual personalities while continually striving to be better and kinder to others. Seven participants claimed that self-acceptance or feeling positive about themselves was the outcome of personal spiritual well-being.

Liking self: Four out of ten novice clergy equated liking themselves with self- acceptance, which they claim to be the outcome of personal spiritual well-being. This is because it makes them feel at peace and at ease within themselves, or pleased with the personal qualities they have discovered in themselves. Thus, they find it easy to like and to accept themselves.

Theme 5. A sense of purpose

Sixty percent of the participants stated that, in their experience, a sense of purpose and in particular, a true sense of vocation is another outcome of personal spiritual well-being. These novice clergy said that the advantage of being in harmony with themselves, by having time and space to reflect on their lives and vocation, gave them the opportunity to discern their vocation and their dreams and reflect on their day-to-day lives. Thus, they could examine their motives and clarify their vocation. A firm sense of purpose helped them pursue their dreams. Whenever they understand and find meaning in what they are doing, they feel their lives are being well-directed.

IV. Experiencing Environmental Spiritual Well-being Reported by the Senior Priests

During the in-depth interviews, three themes emerged in the experience of senior priests regarding environmental spiritual well-being. They equated environmental spiritual well-being (a) with the feeling of relationship with the natural world (b) with a sense of wholeness and (c) with the experience of tranquility.

Experiencing Environmental Spiritual Well-being Reported by the Senior Priests (n = 10)

Themes	Subthemes	Frequency	Exemplars
The sense of connectedness with nature	Feeling in tune with nature	Variants	“I love being out in the natural environment. I enjoy the surprises of nature as a real treat. That is what environmental spiritual well- being means for me.”

	Feeling at home with nature	Typical	“Environmental spiritual well-being for me means being at home with nature whenever I have a chance to be out in natural surroundings.”
A sense of wholeness	A sense of oneness with God and with the world	Typical	“God is the Creator and this universe is his creation. My presence in this universe assures me that I am part of his work. We are one and we have a share in his goodness and love.”
	The sense of being at one with the true spirit	Variant	“I believe in the presence of a true spirit in nature. Whenever I am out- of-doors in my natural surroundings or when I show my care for nature, I experience a feeling of oneness with its true spirit.”
A sense of Tranquility	The sense of peace	General	“I find it difficult to express my feelings, but whenever I am in beautiful natural surroundings, I always experience a sense of peace.”

N = 10; General = 9 – 10 cases; Typical = 6 – 8 cases; Variant = 2 – 5 cases

Theme 1. The sense of connectedness with nature

The feeling of relationship with nature is a sense of being part of nature for the senior priests. This finding is consistent with previous findings that those who experience a relationship with nature have a feeling of being part of nature himself. People who experience being part of nature feel they are sharing space, surroundings, essence and habitat with nature. However, the participants in this present study said they experienced a relationship with nature as if they were part of it because they were in tune with nature and felt at home in natural surroundings. Forty percent of the respondents equated environmental spiritual well-being with feeling in tune with nature, which meant that they could appreciate the beauty and wonder of their natural environment. They said it was a real treat to have the opportunity to admire the wonders of nature.

Feeling in tune with nature. Four out of ten senior priests equated feelings in tune with nature to environmental spiritual well-being. For them, this means being in harmony with the beauty of the natural environment. They appreciated the wonder of nature and consider the opportunity to admire it a real treat. For these participants, experiencing environment spiritual well-being goes together with the ability to appreciate and to feel the beauty and the wonder of nature. The more they were able to feel in tune with nature, the better they felt spiritually well in the environmental component.

Feeling at home with nature. Six out of 10 priests equated environmental spiritual well-being with feeling at home with nature. They considered connectedness with nature as an indispensable part of their lives. The priests who equated environmental spiritual well-being with feeling at home with nature focus on the sense of belonging, membership, and responsibility in their relationship with nature and the feeling of being part with natural world contributes to their happiness and as this happens, they experience environmental spiritual well-being.

Theme 2. A sense of wholeness

The participants also equated environmental spiritual well-being with a sense of wholeness, which for them means union with God and with the world and a sense of being at one with the true spirit. Most of the priests equated environmental spiritual well-being with a sense of oneness with God and with the whole world.

A sense of oneness with God and with the world. Almost all the participants equated environmental spiritual well-being with an experience of wholeness or the experience of oneness with God and with the world. They are aware of being part of God’s total creation. For them, human life is based on three fundamental relationships: our relationship with God, our relationship with other people and our relationship with the earth. These relationships are intimately connected with each other. Through relationship with nature, they realize their closeness to others and to God, their Creator.

The sense of being at one with the true spirit. Three out of 10 participants stated that environmental spiritual well-being meant having a sense of oneness with the true spirit of nature. They experienced the spiritual life as a relationship with nature and the need to care for the environment. They saw this as a responsibility to be integrated into their spiritual life, which means that they experienced a sense of being at one with the true spirit of nature.

Theme 3. A sense of tranquility

Almost all the senior priests, i.e. 90%, said they felt at peace in natural surroundings. Thus, they equated environmental spiritual well-being with a sense of tranquility. For these participants, absorbing the wonders of nature in tranquil surroundings tended to create a sense of peace. For them, the quality of their relationship with nature determines the degree to which they experience inner peace. The quiet atmosphere, the fresh air, the beautiful scenery, and the greenness of nature enable them to feel at peace and to experience tranquility of mind and heart. As parish priests, they have the privilege of spending more time with nature because of their monthly and annual retreats.

The sense of peace. Almost all participants, nine of them, equated their sense of peace or feeling at peace with nature to environmental spiritual well-being. They said that environmental spiritual well-being meant being able to experience peace every time they found themselves in a natural environment. The quiet atmosphere, fresh air, beautiful scenery, the greenness, and the movements of nature enable them to feel at peace and to experience tranquility of mind and heart. It came out that different types of green spaces brought them a sense of tranquility. This, in turn, provides them a sense of peace and inner joy. As a result, these participants would experience environmental spiritual well-being if they were able to experience the tranquil life while being in a natural environment. Ninety percent of the senior priests claimed that spending time in a natural environment brought peace of mind and relieved their feelings of stress.

V. Factors Influencing Environmental Spiritual Well-being Reported by the Senior Priests

The factors relating to environmental spiritual well-being are personal, cultural and spiritual. The personally-related factors reflect their love of nature and the realization of their responsibility to care for the natural environment and their personal need of solitude. The culturally-related factors show how the Myanmar culture influences their attitude to their natural surroundings, and the spiritually-related factors reflect their belief in the presence of God in nature and in nature’s power of spiritual healing. These significant factors bring the clergy closer to the natural world and contribute to the quality of their spiritual well-being in the environmental domain.

Factors Influencing Environmental Spiritual Well-being Reported by the Senior Priests (n = 10)

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplars
Personally-related factors	A love of nature	Typical	“I think I have a great love of nature, because I love spending time in natural surroundings. The loveliness of nature stirs deep emotions within me.”

	<p>Personal attitudes towards nature</p> <p>A sense of responsibility</p> <p>The need for Solitude</p>	<p>Variant</p> <p>Variant</p> <p>Variant</p>	<p>“For me, a non-violent attitude towards all living creatures is important for harmony in the universe. I believe that the more we try to protect nature, the better nature in her turn will she provide for us.”</p> <p>“In order to enjoy fresh air and clean water, I must know how to contribute to the protection of these natural resources through my attitude to the environment.”</p> <p>“Solitude is absolutely necessary for my spiritual life. Spending time with nature is the best choice for me.”</p>
Culturally-related factors	<p>The view about nature as the vital resource for human survival</p> <p>The acknowledgement of interdependent relationship between human beings and nature</p>	<p>Variant</p> <p>Typical</p>	<p>“I am really grateful to mother earth for all that I have received from her...”</p> <p>“Human beings and nature are mutually dependent, since we are all part of the one universe. In order to preserve the wholeness of this universe, human beings must realize their role in relation to nature.”</p>
Spiritually-related factors	<p>The belief in the presence of God in nature</p> <p>Belief in nature’s power of spiritual healing</p>	<p>Typical</p> <p>Variant</p>	<p>“The more I am in contact with nature, the more I realize the presence of God in this universe. Whenever I can glimpse nature’s loveliness and the wonder of it, I see the powerful hand of God in the making of such fantastic beauty.”</p> <p>“I enjoy watching how plants grow day by day. Their freshness relaxes and calms me down whenever I am feeling stressed. At the same time, I experience peace of mind.”</p>

N = 10; General = 9 – 10 cases; Typical = 6 – 8 cases; Variant = 2 – 5 cases

Theme 1. Personally-related factors

The priests are motivated to spend as much time as possible with nature simply because they love nature. They are very sensitive to the loveliness of nature even in the littlest things as well as in the wider natural surroundings. Sixty percent of the priests reported their love of nature expressing positive personal feelings towards nature, a gentle respect both for the animate and inanimate world, acknowledging the value of our natural resources and the necessity of environmental protection.

A love of nature. Six out of ten senior priests spoke of their love of nature as a significant factor bringing them closer to the natural world, and of the feeling of harmony they experience in their relationship with nature. More importantly, their love for nature drew their attention to natural surroundings.

Personal attitudes towards nature. Four senior priests said that their personal attitude towards nature was

a true relationship with them. They express a gentle respect for the world of nature, animate and inanimate, acknowledging the value of our natural resources and the necessity of environmental protection. These attitudes result from a feeling of being in tune with nature, of harmony and peace and a real experience of spiritual enrichment.

A sense of responsibility for nature. Five out of ten participants perceive that the quality of their relationship with nature entails responsibility for the natural environment. They believe that it is morally wrong for human beings to wantonly exploit our natural resources merely for profit. We should act responsibly in the use of these shared natural resources not only by respecting their loveliness but also by protecting the quality of our air and water from pollution, and by ensuring their benefit for future generations.

The need for solitude. Four out of 10 participants expressed that their need for solitude is one of the significant factors that draw their attention to natural world. The experience of burden and tiredness of work evoke in them a need for being alone or solitude sometimes in order to refresh the experience of overwork or stress. Green spaces are the most comfortable, relevant, significant place that can provide them a sense of tranquility.

Theme 2. Culturally- related factors

The attitudes of these priests to nature are deeply influenced by their culture. Two factors emerged from the in-depth interviews: (1) their perception of nature as the vital resource for human survival and (2) the realization of the interdependence between human beings and nature. Forty percent of the participants were aware of nature as the vital resource for human survival and expressed their gratitude for the benefits of the natural world:

The view about nature as the vital resource for human survival. It came out from in-depth interviews that the way the participants view on nature was influenced by their culture. For instance, their culture told them that natural resources provide for vital human needs and they need to show our respect to nature. For instance, all human and animal life needs clean air for daily survival. Water pollution undermines health. They insist that as human beings we should be grateful to mother earth for nurturing us with her resources. A feeling of gratitude brings them closer to nature and they feel at home in a natural environment.

The acknowledgement of interdependent relationship between nature and human beings. Six priests mentioned that their sense of dependence on natural resources enriched their quality of their relationship with nature. They realize that human beings and nature are mutually dependent because natural resources provide everything that meets the basic human needs for survival. Therefore, people need to realize their responsibility to protect the quality of the natural environment.

Theme 3. Spiritually-related factors

Spiritual factors also influence the quality of the relationship between the priests and their natural environment. Seventy percent of the priests expressed their belief in the presence of God in nature because He is its Creator. They claim to meet God in nature and experience His blessings in a natural environment.

The belief in the presence of God in nature. Almost all (7) participants firmly believe that God is our Creator and that everything in this universe is His creation. Therefore, they tend to feel close to nature and at home in a natural environment because they believe that in the natural world, they can be in touch with God and deepen their relationship with Him. Therefore, the quality of their relationship with nature plays a

significant role in the quality of their relationship with God which in turn brings them a sense of peace and of oneness with the natural world and a sense of connecting with its true spirit.

Belief in nature’s power of spiritual healing. Three out of 10 senior priests also claim that their belief in spiritual healing is one of the reasons that attracts them to come closer to nature and enhances the quality of their relationship with the natural environment. Spiritual healing for them means peace of mind, interior joy and a feeling of blessedness which result from significant experiences in their relationship with nature.

VI. Benefits of Having Environmental Spiritual Well-being Reported by Senior Priests

It is widely recognized that spiritual well-being is an important aspect in the wellness of people and actual proof has recently been offered. Current research has shown that positive benefits such as psychological and affective health can be attained by more frequent interaction with the natural environment. Closeness to nature contributes to increased physical, mental and social well-being. It is to be noted that although benefits to health from contact with the natural environment are on the increase, they come mainly from exposure to green spaces. Spending time in green spaces leads to improved general and mental health. Many people nowadays seek tranquility as they take a walk in the park, pause to watch the waves of the ocean lapping on the seashore or listen to the sound of bird song. They are looking for a soothing, restorative sense of healing. Thus, contact with nature would appear to be an important element in personal well-being. The participants in this present study also reported that their relationship with nature was beneficial to their health.

Benefits of Having Environmental Spiritual Well-being Reported by Senior Priests (n = 10)

Themes	Sub-themes	Frequency	Exemplars
Peace of mind		General	“Spending time in natural surroundings always gives me peace of mind and tranquility.”
Acceptance	Self-acceptance	Typical	“In this life, nothing is lasting. A flower may be very beautiful today but wither away tomorrow. Nothing is perfect. As a human being, I should enjoy my strength and accept my limitations.”
	Others-acceptance	Variant	“The trees in a forest may differ from one another in terms of size, color, and shape; nonetheless they remain together, each contributing to the loveliness and vitality of the whole. The experience of such unity in diversity has helped me to appreciate more and to respect the uniqueness of other people and to accept their differences. This enables me to develop and maintain a more positive and harmonious relationship with them.”
Increased problem-solving skills	Increased creativity	Variant	“Too much concentration on my daily tasks sometimes makes me feel tense, enervated and less efficient... by immersing myself in nature, I am able to feel refreshed and relaxed, grounded and my brain seems to recover its activity. Then I can deal better and more effectively with my daily tasks.”

	Increased critical thinking	Variant	Just taking a walk in a park, or in a garden or practicing mindfulness for a longer or shorter period of time in a quiet and solitary place. This helps me to “unplug my mind” from distressful thoughts or heavy feelings. As a result, I feel much better and my mind seems to produce more critical thinking and more positive thoughts.
Increased happiness		Typical	“In our parish community, we are encouraged to spend time out-of-doors and I love doing this because in my experience, spending time with nature increases my energy and makes me feel happier.”
Better physical health		Typical	“Spending time out-of-doors every weekend recharges my mind and gives me the opportunity to take physical exercise which in its turn keeps me healthy.

N = 10; General = 9 – 10 cases; Typical = 6 – 8 cases; Variant = 2 – 5 cases

Theme 1. Peace of mind

Ninety percent of the senior priests claimed that spending time in a natural environment brought peace of mind and relieved their feelings of stress. Whenever they could spend time outdoors, they experienced tranquility, peace and contentment. Put it differently, different types and quality of green spaces enable them to experience peace. For instance, green colour brings about calm and relaxation. The tranquility of the natural world also appears as a significant source for peace as this in turn affected their emotions.

Theme 2. Acceptance

Another benefit of environmental spiritual well-being as reported by the participants was acceptance. This includes self-acceptance and the acceptance of other people. According to the priests, the lessons that they learnt from nature enabled them to accept themselves and others.

Self-acceptance. Almost all (7) of participants acknowledge that self-acceptance has emerged as another benefit of environmental spiritual well-being. Put it differently, the lessons they learnt from nature through connecting with it enhanced their ability to self-acceptance.

Others-acceptance. Four out of 10 senior priests also mentioned that the lessons they had learnt from nature help them relate better with other people, recognizing and appreciating others’ uniqueness.

Theme 3. Increased problem-solving skills

Another benefit of environmental spiritual well-being as reported by the clergy is their increased ability to solve their problems. They claimed that their relationship with nature increases creativity and that exposure to the natural environment offered them the opportunity for thoughtful reflection, provided mental refreshment and stimulation.

Increased creativity. Three participants claimed that exposure to the natural environment offered them the opportunity for thoughtful reflection, providing mental refreshment and stimulation. As a result, they experienced more creative reasoning and more efficient performance.

Increased critical thinking. Four out of 10 participants shared that immersion in nature increased their

critical thinking. Quiet reflection in natural surroundings helps these priests avoid destructive self-criticism and turn their thoughts to more useful things.

Theme 4. Increased happiness

Another beneficial outcome of environmental spiritual well-being is happiness. The participants said they always felt happier when finding time to be in touch with nature. They became more alive, energetic and happy amidst natural stillness and beauty. Sixty percent of them claimed happiness to be one of the benefits of environmental spiritual well-being.

Theme 5. Better physical health.

Improved physical health is another beneficial outcome of environmental spiritual well-being. Sixty percent of the priests affirmed that being in touch with the world of nature improved their health because setting aside quality time to rest and relax through mindfulness or meditation in a tranquil natural environment enables them to recover lost energy, relax their muscles and relieve nervous tension.

DISCUSSION

The present study attempted to explore how the novice clergy describe their experience of spiritual well-being within personal component; the factors influence their personal spiritual well-being and the benefits of having personal spiritual well-being. Similarly, the study also explored how senior priests describe their experience of spiritual well-being within environmental component; the factors influence their environmental spiritual well-being and the benefits of having spiritual well-being within environmental component.

First, the common emerging themes of the novice clergy's experience of spiritual well-being within personal component revealed that the novice clergy experienced spiritual well-being through the perception that they have about themselves, through the ability to stay in harmony with self and through the ability to be aware of their personal potential and being able to actualize it to meet their needs. In other words, the novice clergy describe their experience of spiritual well-being through the experience of congruence between their 'head' and their 'heart.'

Secondly, the results suggested that the sources of the novice clergy's personal spiritual well-being are the quality of relationship with God and with others as well as prayer life. Placing themselves in a comparison between before their ordination and after, they shared that they could see the difference or the changes within them because of the quality of their relationship with God, with others as well as prayer life. These relationships contribute to the 'shape' of who they are now which made them happier.

Third, the common emerging themes of benefits of having spiritual well-being within personal component revealed that spiritual well-being is a significant source of psychological well-being among the novice clergy. Importantly, personal spiritual well-being or quality of relationship with self is beneficial to their psychological well-being in terms of personal growth, purpose in life, self-acceptance, environmental control, emotional stability. Almost all these themes of benefits of having personal spiritual well-being fall into the core dimensions of Ryff's (1989) psychological well-being. More importantly, novice clergy experienced their psychological well-being particularly through the sense of personal growth, purpose in life and self-acceptance.

Fourth, the common themes emerged suggest that the senior priests experience spiritual well-being within environmental component through the experience of the values that they have in relation with nature. The experience of spiritual well-being for them goes together with the sense of connectedness with nature, a

sense of wholeness and a sense of tranquility.

Fifth, it came out from the results that there are several significant factors that influence spiritual well-being in environmental component among the senior priests. These factors fall into personal factors, cultural factors and spiritual factors.

Sixth, the common emerging themes of the benefits of having spiritual well-being within environmental component revealed that environmental spiritual well-being influenced multiple facets of wellness of senior priests such as psychological, emotional and physical well-being. The results suggest that having spiritual well-being within personal and environmental component benefits multiple facets of psychological well-being among the novice clergy and senior priests.

CONCLUSION

The present study found that spiritual well-being significantly impacts psychological well-being among clergy. As a result, the findings suggest that the quality of relationship with self and with the natural environment significantly impact psychological well-being among these two groups. Relationship with God and with others enhanced the quality of relationship with self among novice clergy while these relationships are increased by connecting with natural environment which in return bring them closer to natural environment as well. These findings showed that there are interrelations among the components of spiritual well-being when one component of spiritual well-being is developed, the other components of spiritual well-being are increased as well. The differences between the novice clergy and senior priests in terms of how they experienced psychological well-being revealed that the aspects of psychological well-being namely personal growth and purpose in life are the main concerns for the novice clergy. However, these aspects of psychological well-being have been declined and no longer present in the case of senior priests in terms of how they experienced psychological well-being.

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