

Spiritualism and Sleep Quality: A Gender-Based Analysis

Vijayalakshmi Purushothaman, Maanvi Suresh, Divya Bharathi A,
Viginesh M, Akshaya S, and Bala Bharathi K,

Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (DU)
Chennai.

Spiritualism is the idea that deceased spirits speak to living people through a medium and see the spirit as the fundamental element of existence. The study aims to examine the influence of spiritualism on sleep quality and explore potential gender differences. The data was collected from 357 individuals aged between 30 and 60 years. Nonetheless, a correlation between spiritualism and daytime dysfunction was discovered, indicating that spiritualism can affect people's capacity for productive daytime work. Additionally, compared to men, women have higher degrees of paranormal beliefs, such as spiritualism, which could be explained by psychological characteristics like empathy and intuition.

Keywords: Spiritualism, Quality of Sleep, Daytime dysfunction

Spiritualism, in connection to religion, is a belief system based on the premise that deceased souls can communicate with the living. Spiritualists aim to establish touch with the deceased, frequently relying on a medium who can connect directly with spirits. Some mediums enter a trance-like state and claim to be able to facilitate different paranormal events, such as object movement, which spirits use to communicate their presence. During the Middle Ages, those who were thought to be under the influence of devils also experienced some of the phenomena connected to mediums, such as levitation and speaking in tongues they did not understand. Similar accounts of the presence of quasi-material spirits and the gain of information through spirit communication were found during the early modern period's witch trials. The rise of spiritualism has influenced the field of psychic research, which looks into the assertions made by mediums and others who support them. Numerous methods were developed to look into more complicated phenomena connected to spirit contact as well as more fundamental psychic

experiences including clairvoyance, telepathy, and precognition.

In the past, spiritualism was divided into tiny circles that met to have spiritual conversations. Public demonstrations of psychic phenomena and spirit contact were arranged at larger gatherings. Numerous groups even established up camps where believers could gather in a casual environment, meet daily, and have one-on-one sessions with mediums. At first, the purpose of spiritualist meetings was to prove and investigate mental abilities including telepathy, clairvoyance, and spirit communication.

At first, the purpose of spiritualist meetings was to prove and investigate mental abilities including telepathy, clairvoyance, and spirit communication. In order to create theoretical frameworks that described how spirit contact may happen, the messages that mediums transmitted were studied. Media that specialized in displaying more spectacular physical events came into being as a result of earlier trends. It was thought

that spirits could materialize objects, including themselves, leave markings similar to photographs on photographic plates, talk without the aid of a medium, and levitate objects.

Considerable effort was put into confirming the occurrences of mediumship at the end of the 19th century, especially the sporadic appearance of spirit entities. The earliest decades of the movement saw the emergence of spiritualist beliefs. One of the main beliefs of spiritualism is that people go to a spiritual realm after death and continue to dwell there. It's widely accepted that communicating with the spiritual realm is desirable and feasible, and that doing so frequently leads to spiritual healing. The morality of a person's human existence is said to have a direct impact on their post-death state. Many subjects in psychic study expected good results, and others came to the conclusion that they had confirmed the reality of spirit communication or established the presence of clairvoyance.

Curiosity about the paranormal as well as deeper worries about the destiny of the human soul have been the driving forces behind the quest of spiritualism. Spiritualism has given people who reject the idea of an afterlife due to their materialistic worldview a fresh chance at immortality. By offering the chance to communicate with them, it has also given comfort to individuals going through sadness after losing loved ones. It is difficult to unbiasedly assess the data confirming or disputing spiritualism's claims because of the intense emotional attachment that comes with either side of the debate.

Spiritualism is a component of paranormal beliefs, which comprises phenomena that go beyond or contradict the scientific criteria of the natural world. In contrast, according to the National Institute of Health, sleep is an essential part of a person's daily routine and is closely linked to improved physical, cognitive, and psychological well-being.

Conversely, poor or disrupted sleep can negatively affect cognitive, physical, and psychological functioning. Although our perspectives on various matters have changed over time, paranormal beliefs still exist among individuals. These beliefs stem from various factors such as culture, religion, and personal development, influencing behaviors, perceptions, attitudes, and other aspects of daily life. Cognitive biases play a role in mediating the relationship between paranormal beliefs and sleep. It is practically impossible to disprove the existence of all paranormal phenomena. Regarding emotional reasoning, previous research suggests that paranormal beliefs arise from their emotional appeal. Several studies have highlighted gender differences in paranormal beliefs, which have been associated with brain processes and personality.

Extensive studies have demonstrated that high-quality sleep has become an increasingly important public health concern, as poor sleep quality is associated with a higher risk of mental disorders such as depression and anxiety. Sleep has been recognized as a significant factor affecting mental and physical health, productivity, and overall quality of life. Some individuals may experience sleep disturbances due to nightmares, sleep paralysis, lucid dreaming, insomnia, and other factors. Those who suffer from sleep paralysis are more likely to hold paranormal and spiritual beliefs, as identified in a study conducted by Gujarat Forensic Sciences University (GFSU). These episodes typically occur at night without neurological abnormalities. Individuals experiencing sleep paralysis also exhibit higher levels of religious and paranormal beliefs, although they attribute mental disturbances as causal factors for their sleep paralysis.

This suggests that they may have reservations about openly expressing their religious and paranormal beliefs. The study considers various psychological factors such

as stressful life events, feelings of inadequacy, spirituality, and paranormal beliefs. Based on these findings, it was concluded that altered states of consciousness often reflect psychological aspects of the relationship between paranormal beliefs and experiences. Altered states of consciousness encompass phenomena such as lucid dreams, transitions between sleep and wakefulness (hypnagogic and hypnopompic states), and out-of-body experiences (the sensation of separating from the physical body). Although the direct relationship between paranormal beliefs and lucid dreaming is weak, research consistently reveals a significant association between paranormal beliefs and lucid dreaming. Therefore, further research is needed to examine the extent to which such beliefs impact sleep quality. Additionally, differences in attitudes and perceptions between men and women should be considered, which is why our objective is to explore which gender exerts a greater influence on sleep quality. Another reason to consider is the lack of studies with similar variables of interest and population.

Objective

To assess the gender-based variations in the impact of spiritualism by finding the correlation between males and females on spiritual beliefs and to find out if there is a significant association between spiritualism and quality of sleep.

Hypotheses

H₁: There is a significant association between spiritualism and quality of sleep.

H₂: There exists a significant difference between levels of impact of spiritualism among men and women.

Method

Participants

For this study, a sample of individuals aged 30-60 years, comprising both males and

females, was selected. Convenience sampling was employed, and data was collected from 357 participants residing in the Chennai district. Among the 357 participants of the study, (210 participants) were females and (147 participants) and were found from different parts of Chennai. Exclusion criteria for the study included transgender individuals, individuals with psychiatric illnesses, and those who did not hold paranormal beliefs.

Measures

The Revised Paranormal Beliefs Scale, developed by Tobacyk in 2004, is a 26-item questionnaire designed to measure the extent of paranormal beliefs across seven components: Psi, Superstition, Spiritualism, Witchcraft, Traditional Religious Beliefs, Extraordinary Lifeforms, and Precognition. Respondents rate their agreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) 2 (Moderately Disagree), 3 (Slightly Disagree), 4 (Uncertain), 5 (Slightly Agree), 6 (Moderately Agree), 7 (Strongly Agree). Item 23 is reverse scored.

Pittsburgh Quality of Sleep Index, constructed by Buysse and colleagues in 1988 assesses the quality of sleep, in terms of seven components- Subjective Sleep Quality, Sleep Latency, Sleep Duration, Habitual Sleep Efficiency, Sleep Disturbances, Use of Sleep medications, Daytime Dysfunctions. The global score helps determine the same, higher scores indicate higher problems with sleep.

Results and Discussion

Based on the findings presented in Table I, no significant association was observed between spiritualism and the overall quality of sleep. However, it was discovered that spiritualism does have a significant correlation with daytime dysfunction, which is a component of sleep. The relationship

between human beliefs and sleep is influenced by cultural and religious beliefs, as well as their impact on daily

responsibilities. These factors have an influence on sleep patterns and sleep-related beliefs.

Table 1. Correlation between spiritualism and quality of sleep

		Subjective Sleep Quality	Sleep Latency	Sleep Duration	Habitual Sleep Efficiency	Sleep Disturbances	Use of Sleep Medication	Daytime Dysfunctions	Global PQSI
Spiritualism	Pearson Correlation	.048	.083	.044	.021	.039	.071	.125	.023
	Sig(2 tailed)	.366	.118	.410	.699	.465	.183	.018*	.665
	N	357	357	357	357	357	357	357	357

*Significant at 0.05 level

Our perception of reality is filtered through various lenses such as beliefs, hypotheses, biases, and prejudices. Education plays a role in shaping paranormal ideas, which spiritualism is a part of, and it emphasizes critical and analytical thinking. Some studies suggest that paranormal beliefs are linked to a lack of critical thinking and rationality (Gray & Mill, 1990; Musch & Ehrenberg, 2002). Furthermore, spiritualism has been found to be susceptible to the power of suggestion and the illusion of free will (Derbyshire, 2013). Eysenck's concept of secondary suggestibility suggests that indirect suggestions can influence a subject's perceptions. A study conducted by F. J in 1967 revealed that suggestibility may be associated with classical, verbal, and sensory conditioning in the normal waking state. These factors may subsequently affect behavioral responses that hinder optimal functioning during the daytime.

An experiment conducted by Lucas has linked the influence of free will to the circadian clock, of which sleep is an integral part. It can be inferred that spiritualism is associated with daytime dysfunction through sensory responses that impact behaviors.

Table II demonstrates a statistically significant difference in the level of

paranormal beliefs, including spiritualism, between genders. This significance is observed at a 0.05 level (2-tailed). The inference drawn from the data indicates that females exhibit higher levels of paranormal beliefs compared to males. This aligns with historical observations that women have historically shown a consistent interest in the spirit world. The current popularity of spiritualism can be attributed to the increased power and visibility of women, providing prominence to the spirit world in society.

Table 2. A significant difference between levels of impact of spiritualism among men and women.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig
Paranormal Beliefs	Male	142	73.126	29.76405	.000
	Female	215	887.6605	30.70634	.000*

T-test comparison of differences in gender among participants

*Significant at 0.05 level

Silva and Woody (2022) have suggested that women may have a stronger inclination toward supernatural explanations that cannot be scientifically validated. It has been

proposed that age and gender influence the interpretation of paranormal belief test items, leading to differences in impact. Various analyses have indicated that gender variations exist in paranormal or supernatural beliefs, which could be influenced by a complex interplay of sociological and psychological factors. Studies have linked these beliefs to a greater preference for intuitive thinking and a lesser preference for analytical thinking (Aarnio & Lindeman, 2005; Pennycook et al., 2012). This preference for intuitive thinking styles is found to be higher in women compared to men (Ward & King, 2020). Furthermore, cognitive differences related to empathizing and systematizing have been identified, where higher levels of empathizing and lower levels of systematizing are associated with greater paranormal beliefs, particularly among women (Lindeman et al., 2015).

Limitations and Recommendations

It is important to acknowledge certain limitations of the current study, such as the relatively small sample size, which may restrict the generalizability of the results. Additionally, there is a scarcity of studies conducted in the same domain as ours. Nevertheless, this study contributes to our understanding of seance rituals and the role of mediums, shedding light on the power of suggestion and questioning the nature of free will.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the findings indicate that spiritualism does not show a significant correlation with the overall quality of sleep. However, it does have a significant impact on daytime dysfunction, a component of sleep. Moreover, females exhibit higher levels of paranormal beliefs, including spiritualism, which may be attributed to psychological and social factors such as higher levels of empathy and intuition compared to men.

References

- Aarnio, Lindeman (2005) "*Paranormal beliefs, education, and thinking styles.*" 39(7):1227-1236 DOI:10.1016/j.paid.2005.04.009
- Asch, Solomon E. (1952) 1959 "*Social Psychology.*" Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall.
- Derbyshire. (2013, October 19). "*The psychology of spiritualism: Science and seances. The Guardian.*" Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/oct/20/seances-and-science>
- Encyclopedia Britannica, inc. (n.d.). Spiritualism. Encyclopedia Britannica. Retrieved June 16, 2022, from <https://www.britannica.com/topic/spiritualism-religion>
- Evans, F. J. (1967). "*Suggestibility in the normal waking state.*" Psychological Bulletin, 67(2), 114–129. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0024086>
- Lucas, R. J. (2021, August). "*Chronotype and circadian reafference: the impact of free will on the mammalian circadian clock.*" UK Research and Innovation.
- Lindeman, M., Svedholm-Häkkinen, A. M., & Lipsanen, J. (2015). "*Ontological confusion but not mentalizing abilities predict religious belief, paranormal belief, and belief in supernatural purpose.*" Cognition, 134, 63–76. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cognition.2014.09.008>
- Scheitle, C. P. (2005). "*Bringing Out the Dead: Gender and Historical Cycles of Spiritualism.*" OMEGA - Journal of Death and Dying, 50(3), 237–253. <https://doi.org/10.2190/KF90-QELU-FVTH-1R4U>
- Silva, T., & Woody, A. (2022). "*Supernatural Sociology: Americans' Beliefs by Race/Ethnicity, Gender, and Education*". Socius, 8, 23780231221084776. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23780231221084775>
- Villani, D., Sorgente, A., Iannello, P., & Antonietti, A. (1AD, January 1). "*The role of spirituality*

and religiosity in the subjective well-being of individuals with different religious statuses. Frontiers. Retrieved June 16, 2022, from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.01525/full#ref4>

Ward, S. J., & King, L. A. (2020). "Examining the roles of intuition and gender in magical beliefs". Journal of Research in Personality, 86, 103956. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2020.103956>

Vijayalakshmi Purushothaman, PhD, Associate Professor & HoD, Division of Applied Psychology, Department of Behavioural Sciences, Faculty of Allied Health Sciences, Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and research (DU), Porur, Chennai -600 116.

Maanvi Suresh, Divya Bharathi A ,Viginesh M , Akshaya S, and Bala Bharathi K, Sri Ramachandra Institute of Higher Education and Research (DU), Porur, Chennai -600 116.