

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

Arjun Kumar¹, Dr. Debasruti Ghosh^{2*}, Dr. Saurabh Raj^{3*}

ABSTRACT

The empty nest transition represents a critical psychosocial phase in later life, often accompanied by loneliness, loss of role identity, and psychological vulnerability. In collectivist and religious societies, religiosity and spirituality frequently emerge as salient coping resources. The present narrative review synthesizes empirical evidence on the role of religiosity in the psychological well-being of elderly individuals experiencing empty nest transition. Drawing on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies across diverse cultural contexts, the review identifies key pathways through which religiosity influences well-being, including coping styles, social integration, meaning-making, and transcendence. The review also highlights methodological trends, thematic patterns, and research gaps, offering implications for geriatric mental health interventions and policy.

Keywords: *Religiosity, Psychological Well-Being, Elderly Experiencing, Empty Nest Transition, Narrative Review*

Population aging is a global phenomenon, with India experiencing a rapid increase in its elderly population. According to the Population Census (2011), India is home to nearly 104 million elderly persons aged 60 years and above, comprising approximately 53 million females and 51 million males. In the past two decades there has been a significant, wherein elderly women are now outnumbering elderly men. This rising trend raises serious concerns for policymakers given the heightened social, economic, and psychological vulnerabilities faced by older women. Furthermore, nearly 71% of the elderly population resides in rural areas, where access to formal mental health and social support services remains limited. Given this background, the empty nest phase which is marked by children leaving the parental home due to marriage, employment, or education stands out to be a major life event in old age. For many elderly individuals, particularly in collectivist cultures where parental identity is deeply tied to caregiving roles, this transition can result in loneliness, purposelessness, and diminished psychological well-being. However, not all elderly individuals experience the empty nest as distressing, suggesting the presence of protective psychosocial resources.

¹Research Scholar, Department of Psychology, B.R.A Bihar University, Muzaffarpur

²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, MDDM College, Muzaffarpur

³Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, RDS College, Muzaffarpur

*Corresponding Author

Received: May 4, 2026; Revision Received: June 10, 2026; Accepted: June 13, 2026

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

Religiosity has long been recognized as a powerful cultural and psychological force shaping coping, meaning, and social integration. Older adults typically show higher engagement in religious beliefs and practices, making religiosity a potentially significant factor in buffering the adverse effects of empty nest transition. This narrative review aims to critically examine existing literature on religiosity and well-being among elderly individuals experiencing empty nest transition, with particular emphasis on psychological well-being, coping, and quality of life.

Aging is a complex biopsychosocial process involving gradual physical decline, increased prevalence of chronic illness, and heightened vulnerability to psychological disorders such as depression, dementia, and anxiety (Erber, 2013). In later life, individuals often engage in life review, evaluate past achievements, and confront existential concerns, making adaptive coping mechanisms particularly crucial. According to the World Health Organization (WHO, 2002), old age begins at 60 years and is categorized into three phases: early old age (60–74 years), middle or late old age (75–90 years), and longevity (90 years and above). Each phase is associated with distinct psychosocial challenges and support needs.

The concept of empty nest syndrome was first introduced by Dorothy Canfield Fisher (1914) and later elaborated in the 1970s. It refers to the emotional distress experienced by parents when children leave the parental home. Barber's (1979–1981) work highlighted that multiple life events—such as marriage, employment, or military service—can trigger this transition, with no single defining marker. In older adults, the empty nest may coincide with retirement, widowhood, and declining health, compounding psychological vulnerability.

Religiosity refers to the degree of adherence to religious beliefs, practices, and values, encompassing both personal faith and participation in religious communities. In later life, religiosity often provides meaning, emotional comfort, moral guidance, and social connectedness. Moreira et al. (2006) conceptualize religiosity as facilitating flourishing through shared beliefs, rituals, and communal bonds. In the present review, religiosity is treated as an evaluative religious attitude influencing psychological well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a **narrative review methodology** to synthesize existing research on religiosity and well-being among elderly populations, with specific attention to empty nest transition. Peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2010 and 2025 were considered. The review included quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-method studies focusing on elderly individuals (60 years and above), religiosity/spirituality, and indicators of psychological well-being, quality of life, or coping.

Databases such as Google Scholar, PubMed, PsycINFO, and Scopus were consulted using keywords including *empty nest*, *elderly*, *religiosity*, *spirituality*, *psychological well-being*, and *aging*. Studies were selected based on relevance, methodological clarity, and contribution to understanding religiosity–well-being linkages. Due to heterogeneity in measures and designs, findings were synthesized thematically rather than statistically.

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

RESULTS

S N	Author Name& References	Objective	Study location	Design	Nature of sample	Measure used	Key finding
1.	Nabilah, H. H., Kusumawardai, L. H., & Pratama, K. N. (2025).	Objective: This study aims to examine the correlation between religious coping and psychological well-being among empty nester elderly.	Banyumas Subdistric t.	quantitative research cross-sectional approach.	A total sampling technique was used to recruit 102 respondents from October 2024 to January 2025.	Psychological Well-being Scale dan Brief RCOPE BI	There is a significant correlation between religious coping and psychological well-being in elderly empty nesters, with a positive correlation for positive religious coping and a negative correlation for negative religious coping.
2.	Puspitasari, D. A., & Maryanti, L. I. (2021).	The purpose of this study was to determine the relationship between religiosity and empty nest syndrome in the elderly	Larangan Village, Sidoarjo	Correlational analysis product moment correlation data	subjects in this study amounted to 157 people with Non-Probability sampling technique with quota sampling method	using the scale of religiosity and empty nest syndrome scale	This shows that there is a negative relationship between religiosity and empty nest syndrome
3.	Hafeez, A., & Rafique, R. (2013).	The present study investigated whether spirituality and religiosity are predictors of psychological wellbeing in residents of old	Lahore	Linear regression and t-test were used	A sample of (60) male and female residents of old homes was recruited from different old homes	Religious Orientation Scale1, Spirituality Transcendence Scale2 and Psychological Wellbeing Scale3 were used for measuring the study variables.	The study holds implications for further researches and provides directions for psychological assessment and intervention

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

S N	Author Name& References	Objective	Study location	Design	Nature of sample	Measure used	Key finding
		homes.					to enhance psychological wellbeing among residents of old homes.
4.	Borhan, N. (2017).	aimed to investigate the moderator roles of intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being on the relation between wisdom and psychological well-being in older adults.	Turkey	independent t-test analyses, analysis of variance (ANOVA), and pearson correlation coefficients.	Participants of the study were 165 older people (97 females and 68 males) and age range was between 65 and 88	Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale, Religious Orientation Scale, Spiritual Well-being subscale of the Mental, Physical and Spiritual Well-being Scale, Psychological Well-being Scale / Flourishing Scale, Geriatric Depression Scale, Purpose in Life Test, and Heartland Forgiveness Scale.	Results suggested that Turkish version of Three-Dimensional Wisdom Scale is a reliable and valid measurement instrument except iv the reliability and validity of the affective wisdom subscale. In addition, intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being did not moderate wisdom and psychological well-being association in the present study.
5.	Momtaz, Y. A., Ibrahim, R., Hamid, T. A., & Yahaya, N. (2010).	This study examined the mediating effects of social and personal religiosity on the psychological well-being of widowed	Malaysia	bivariate correlation analysis	1367 widowed and married elderly Muslims from	Intrinsic Extrinsic religiosity scale,	Findings show that the potential solace provided by religiosity can decrease the negative effects of widowhood on the psychological

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

S N	Author Name& References	Objective	Study location	Design	Nature of sample	Measure used	Key finding
		elderly people					al well-being of widowed elderly people.
6.	Momtaz, Y. A., Ibrahim, R., Hamid, T. A., & Yahaya, N. (2010).	This study employs multiple religious dimensions and a developmental perspective to identify distinct classes of religiosity among young adults in early and middle adulthood, and to describe how transition patterns in religiosity classes are associated with filial elder-care norms in midlife.	Southern California	Longitudinal Study cross-sectional study	The sample consisted of 365 young adults participating i	five measures of religiosity in Wave-7 and Wave-9 to identify multidimensional religious classes: religious attendance, religious intensity, spirituality, literal beliefs, and civic value of religion. Religious	Findings add a developmental perspective to the literature on religion and filial norms and suggest that trends toward irreligion and increased secularly may portend weakening responsibility for aging parents among middle-aged adults.
7.	Guerrero-Castañeda, R. F., Menezes, T. M. D. O., Prado, M. L. D., & Galindo-Soto, J. A. (2019).	Objective: to understand the life experiences that favor transcendence of the elderly being.		a qualitative phenomenological hermeneutic study	sampling: 11 elderly, achieving theoretical saturation	phenomenological interview with a detonating question.	Finding transcendence of the elderly being is favored with spirituality and the experiences of their daily life are imbued with a spiritual and religious relationship that give meaning to

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

S N	Author Name & References	Objective	Study location	Design	Nature of sample	Measure used	Key finding
							their existence.
8.	Gallardo-Peralta, L. P. (2017).	This study analyses the association between the various dimensions of religiosity and spirituality and the different aspects of quality of life in elderly	north of Chile	Quantitative regression analysis	The study involved a sample of 777 elderly people		Finding Religiosity only presents a specific association with quality of life in terms of the relationship between support from the congregation and satisfaction with social relationships.
9.	Khuzaimah, U., Hinduan, Z. R., Agustiani, H., & Siswadi, A. G. P. (2023).	This current study seeks to identify a model of older persons' psychological well-being formation in a religious group.	South Tapanuli-North Sumatra, Indonesia	This cross-sectional study	included 261 participants, 42 men and 219 women aged 60 and up with normal cognitive, hearing, and/or speech functions.		Findings emphasize the relevance of internal strengths for psychological well-being and give credence to the mediated path model's applicability to older adult communities in Indonesia.

Analysis of the reviewed studies yielded five major themes highlighting the role of religiosity in elderly well-being.

Theme 1: Religious Coping as a Protective Psychological Resource

Multiple studies demonstrate that positive religious coping—such as prayer, trust in divine purpose, and spiritual acceptance—is positively associated with psychological well-being among empty-nesting elders. Nabilah et al. (2025) reported that positive religious coping correlated with higher well-being, while negative religious coping (e.g., feeling punished or

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

abandoned by God) predicted poorer outcomes. This dual role underscores the qualitative nature of religious interpretation in shaping mental health.

Theme 2: Religiosity and Reduction of Empty Nest Distress

Evidence consistently indicates a negative association between religiosity and empty nest syndrome. Puspitasari and Maryanti (2021) found that higher religiosity was linked to lower levels of loneliness, sadness, and loss of purpose. Religious beliefs appear to reframe the empty nest transition as a normative or spiritually meaningful life stage, thereby reducing emotional distress.

Theme 3: Social Integration Through Religious Participation

Several studies emphasize the social dimension of religiosity. Gallardo-Peralta (2017) demonstrated that support from religious congregations significantly enhanced quality of life by improving satisfaction with social relationships. Similarly, religiosity fosters belongingness, which is critical in mitigating isolation during later life transitions.

Theme 4: Religiosity, Spirituality, and Meaning-Making

Qualitative evidence highlights spirituality as a pathway to transcendence and existential meaning. Guerrero-Castañeda et al. (2019) revealed that elderly individuals derive purpose and continuity through spiritual interpretations of daily life. Such meaning-making processes are central to psychological well-being during aging and role transitions.

Theme 5: Contextual and Cultural Variability

Findings also reveal cultural specificity in the religiosity–well-being relationship. While studies in Malaysia, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Turkey emphasize religiosity as a protective factor, Borhan (2017) found no moderating role of intrinsic religiosity between wisdom and well-being. This suggests that religiosity interacts with cultural norms, measurement approaches, and developmental factors.

DISCUSSION

The present review highlights the significant and multifaceted role of religiosity and spirituality in promoting psychological well-being among elderly populations, particularly during the empty nest transition. The thorough examination of literature reveals that in diverse sociocultural settings, religiosity stands out as a protective psychosocial resource that contributes to emotional adjustment, resilience, social connectedness, and meaning-making in later life. The studies collectively suggest that religion and spirituality function not merely as belief systems, but are frameworks of coping processes that shape how older adults interpret aging, loneliness, family separation, and existential concerns.

One of the most consistent findings across the reviewed literature is the positive role of religious coping in enhancing psychological well-being. For example, Nabilah et al., (2025) found that positive religious coping strategies, such as prayer, faith in divine support, and spiritual surrender, were associated with higher levels of psychological well-being among empty nest elderly individuals. On the other hand, negative religious coping that is characterized by feelings of punishment, abandonment, or spiritual dissatisfaction, is a predictor of poor psychological outcomes. These findings align with Pargament's theory of religious coping, which proposes that religion provides individuals with cognitive and emotional resources to deal with stressful life events (Pargament, 2007). From the literature with reference to empty nest transition, religious coping may help elderly individuals

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

reinterpret loneliness and changing family roles through a framework of acceptance, hope, and transcendence.

The findings also demonstrate that religiosity significantly reduces symptoms associated with empty nest syndrome. Puspitasari and Maryanti (2021) reported a negative relationship between religiosity and empty nest syndrome, indicating that elderly individuals with stronger religious orientation experienced lower levels of sadness, loneliness, and emotional emptiness after children left home. Religiosity may serve as a stabilizing factor by providing routine, emotional comfort, and a continued sense of purpose during a period often characterized by role loss and reduced familial interaction. This supports the continuity theory of aging, which suggests that older adults maintain psychological stability by preserving internal values, habits, and belief systems across life transitions. Religious beliefs and practices may therefore enable older adults to adapt more effectively to changing social and familial circumstances.

Another important theme emerging from the review is the role of religiosity in fostering social integration and belongingness. Gallardo-Peralta (2017) found that support from religious congregations was positively associated with satisfaction in social relationships and overall quality of life among elderly individuals in Chile. Religious participation often creates opportunities for interpersonal interaction, emotional support, and community engagement, which are particularly important for older adults vulnerable to social isolation. Empty nest elders may experience reduced daily interaction with family members; therefore, involvement in religious groups can compensate for this loss by creating meaningful social bonds. These findings are consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory, which emphasizes the increasing importance of emotionally meaningful relationships in old age (Carstensen, 2021). Religious communities often provide emotional validation, shared identity, and collective rituals that strengthen feelings of connectedness and reduce psychological distress.

The review further reveals that spirituality contributes substantially to meaning-making and existential well-being among elderly individuals. Guerrero-Castañeda et al. (2019), through a phenomenological approach, demonstrated that spirituality enabled elderly participants to transcend difficulties and derive meaning from their everyday experiences. Similarly, Hafeez and Rafique (2013) identified spirituality and religiosity as significant predictors of psychological well-being among residents of old homes in Lahore. Aging is often accompanied by concerns related to mortality, declining health, dependency, and loss. Spirituality may provide older adults with a framework through which these experiences are understood as meaningful rather than threatening. Viktor Frankl's existential perspective suggests that meaning-making is central to psychological survival, especially during suffering and life transitions. In this regard, spirituality appears to help elderly individuals maintain hope, self-worth, and emotional balance despite physical and social challenges.

The role of religiosity among widowed elderly populations also deserves attention. Momtaz et al. (2010) found that religiosity mediated the negative psychological effects of widowhood among elderly Muslims in Malaysia. Widowhood is often associated with loneliness, grief, and social withdrawal; however, religious involvement may provide emotional solace and a sense of continuity after the loss of a spouse. Religious rituals, communal worship, and faith-based interpretations of suffering may help widowed elderly individuals cope more adaptively with bereavement. Such findings highlight the broader role of religiosity as a psychosocial resilience factor in later adulthood.

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

Despite the largely positive findings, the review also indicates that the religiosity–well-being relationship is not universally uniform. Borhan (2017) reported that intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being did not moderate the relationship between wisdom and psychological well-being among older adults in Turkey. This suggests that the influence of religiosity may vary depending on cultural context, methodological approaches, personality characteristics, and forms of religiosity being measured. Differences in religious traditions, societal norms, and conceptualizations of spirituality may shape how religiosity influences well-being across populations. Therefore, religiosity should not be viewed as a universally protective factor independent of context, but rather as a culturally embedded experience interacting with social and developmental variables.

Overall, the findings of the present review emphasize that religiosity and spirituality play a significant role in supporting psychological well-being among elderly populations, especially during emotionally sensitive transitions such as empty nesting, widowhood, and institutional living. Religiosity contributes to coping, emotional regulation, social support, and existential meaning, all of which are critical components of healthy aging. At the same time, the variability in findings across cultural settings highlights the need for context-sensitive approaches in future research. Further longitudinal and cross-cultural studies are needed to better understand how different dimensions of religiosity influence elderly well-being over time. The findings also hold important implications for mental health professionals, caregivers, and policymakers, suggesting that spiritual and religious resources can be meaningfully integrated into elderly care and psychosocial interventions to promote holistic well-being in later life.

CONCLUSION

Religiosity emerges as a significant psychosocial factor in promoting psychological well-being among elderly individuals experiencing empty nest transition. By providing emotional comfort, social connectedness, and existential meaning, religiosity can buffer against loneliness and psychological decline in later life. Future research should adopt longitudinal, culturally comparative designs to clarify mechanisms and inform faith-integrated geriatric mental health interventions.

Implications and Future Directions

The findings of the present study have important implications for mental health practice, research, and policy related to ageing populations in rural India. Community-based geriatric mental health programs may benefit from the deliberate integration of positive religious and spiritual coping strategies, as religiosity remains a culturally salient and accessible resource for many rural elderly individuals. Mental health professionals and counselors working with older adults should be sensitized and trained to recognize and address negative or maladaptive religious interpretations, such as guilt-driven forgiveness or fatalistic beliefs, which may undermine psychological well-being. Future interventions should adopt interdisciplinary models that integrate religiosity with social support systems and evidence-based psychological resources, including mindfulness-based approaches, to promote holistic well-being. Additionally, future research should prioritize the inclusion of underrepresented groups, particularly rural elderly women, who often experience compounded vulnerabilities due to gender, ageing, and socio-economic disadvantage. Longitudinal and mixed-method studies are recommended to further elucidate the dynamic interplay between cultural, psychological, and social determinants of well-being in later life.

REFERENCES

- Barber CE. Transition to the empty nest. In: *Aging and the family*. New York: Haworth Press; 1989. p. 15–32.
- Borhan N. *Intrinsic religiosity and spiritual well-being as moderators of the relation between wisdom and psychological well-being in elderly* [master's thesis]. Ankara: Middle East Technical University; 2017.
- Carstensen, L. L. (2021). Socioemotional selectivity theory: The role of perceived endings in human motivation. *The Gerontologist*, 61(8), 1188-1196.
- Erber JT. *Aging and older adulthood*. 2nd ed. Hoboken (NJ): John Wiley & Sons; 2012.
- Fisher DC. Dorothy Canfield Fisher. In: *No small lives: handbook of North American early women adult educators, 1925–1950*. Charlotte (NC): Information Age Publishing; 2014. p. 115–124.
- Gallardo-Peralta LP. The relationship between religiosity/spirituality, social support, and quality of life among elderly Chilean people. *Int Soc Work*. 2017;60(6):1498–1511.
- Guerrero-Castañeda RF, Menezes TMO, Prado MLD, Galindo-Soto JA. Spirituality and religiosity for the transcendence of the elderly being. *Rev Bras Enferm*. 2019;72(Suppl 2):259–65.
- Hafeez A, Rafique R. Spirituality and religiosity as predictors of psychological well-being in residents of old homes. *Dialogue (Pak)*. 2013;8(3):285–296.
- Khuzaimah U, Hinduan ZR, Agustiani H, Siswadi AGP. Social support, religiosity, wisdom and well-being among older adults in Indonesia. *Clin Interv Aging*. 2023; 18:1249–1262.
- Mathur A. Measurement and meaning of religiosity: a cross-cultural comparison of religiosity and charitable giving. *J Target Meas Anal Mark*. 2012;20(2):84–95.
- Momtaz YA, Ibrahim R, Hamid TA, Yahaya N. Mediating effects of social and personal religiosity on the psychological well-being of widowed elderly people. *Omega (Westport)*. 2010;61(2):145–162.
- Moreira-Almeida A, Lotufo Neto F, Koenig HG. Religiousness and mental health: a review. *Braz J Psychiatry*. 2006;28(3):242–250.
- Nabilah HH, Kusumawardai LH, Pratama KN. Hubungan koping religius dengan kesejahteraan psikologis lansia empty nester di Kecamatan Banyumas. *J Pers Perawat Nas Indones*. 2025;10(1):65–76.
- Petersen PE. The World Oral Health Report 2003: continuous improvement of oral health in the 21st century—the approach of the WHO Global Oral Health Programme. *Community Dent Oral Epidemiol*. 2003;31(Suppl 1):3–24.
- Puspitasari DA, Maryanti LI. The relationship between religiosity and empty nest syndrome in the elderly. *Indones J Islam Stud*. 2021; 3:10–21.
- Radonjić T, Dukić M, Jovanović I, Zdravković M, Mandić O, Popadić V, et al. Aging of liver in its different diseases. *Int J Mol Sci*. 2022;23(21):13085.
- Velayutham B, Kangusamy B, Joshua V, Mehendale S. The prevalence of disability in elderly in India: analysis of 2011 census data. *Disabil Health J*. 2016;9(4):584–592.
- Zimmer Z, Jagger C, Chiu CT, Ofstedal MB, Rojo F, Saito Y. Spirituality, religiosity, aging and health in global perspective: a review. *SSM Popul Health*. 2016; 2:373–381.

Acknowledgment

The author(s) appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review

How to cite this article: Kumar, A., Ghosh, D. & Raj, S. (2026). Religiosity and Psychological Well-Being Among Elderly Experiencing the Empty Nest Transition: A Narrative Review. *International Journal of Social Impact*, 11(2), 408-418. DIP: 18.02.037/20261102, DOI: 10.25215/2455/1102037