ABSTRACT

The topic of the present research investigation is "Enhancing well-being of the institutionalized elderly through religious and spiritual practices". Aging has been viewed differently by different people. Whereas to some it means power, authority, wisdom and respect, others consider it as a forced retirement leading to a state of dependency, loss of charm and of physical strength. To most, aging implies physiological and psychosocial changes that are reflected in their reduced income, lesser activities, and consequential loss of status, both in the family and in the society. In recent past, family was looked upon as the only institution to take care of the elderly and provide both emotional and financial support to them. But changes in the living arrangements and family structure, migration of children for jobs outside, and more prominently, radical changes in the nature of people from accommodative to an independent, self-centered, and individualistic outlook with callous concern for even very near relations, have compelled many old people to live alone. It appears that the changing family structure has affected the well-being of the elderly by depriving them of the familial support of a traditional joint family set up as well as improving upon them to adjust to the changing values and norms of the younger generation. In the present century, spirituality and religion have become welcome topics for health professionals in general and for mental health professionals in particular. There is a quest to integrate religion and spirituality with human behaviour. For many, spirituality and religion are important sources of strength and coping resources in their lives, and central to their meaning and identity. In this
study, the investigator examined the effectiveness of certain religious and spiritual practices such as prayer and meditation in enhancing well-being of the elderly.

Thirty seven objectives were formulated. One hundred and seven (N=107) institutionalized elderly served as subjects for the present study. The purposive sampling technique was used to draw the sample. Subjects were selected from eight institutionalized homes of the elderly (both private and government) situated in Kerala State, India. Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) developed by Diener, Emmons, Larsen, and Griffin (1985) was administered to measure the well-being of the institutionalized elderly. Religious and Spiritual Practice Inventory (RSPI) developed by the investigator was used to identify the awareness of the respondents for the religious and spiritual practices such as prayer, pilgrimage, fasting and meditation.

The main findings of the present study are:

1. Significant difference existed among the mean scores of Hindu, Muslim and Christian subjects on well-being after two months.
2. Significant difference existed among the mean scores of Hindu, Muslim and Christian subjects on well-being after three months.
3. Significant difference existed in three phases of well-being of male subjects.
4. Significant difference existed in three phases of well-being of female subjects.
5. Significant difference existed in three phases of well-being of young old subjects.
7. Significant difference existed in three phases of well-being of Hindu subjects.

9. Significant difference existed in three phases of well-being of Muslim subjects.

10. Significant difference existed between the frequency of male and female subjects on attachment to religious belief system.

11. Significant difference was found among the frequency of Hindu, Muslim and Christian subjects on attending organized service of Church, Mosque and Temple.

12. Significant difference was found between the frequency of male and female subjects on the strength of religious belief system when compared to others.

13. Significant difference was found among the frequency of Hindu, Muslim and Christian subjects on the practice of meditation.

14. Significant difference was found among the frequency of Hindu, Muslim and Christian subjects in response on the relationship between spirituality and well-being.