

Article

Religiosity and Positive Self-Identity Among Indian University Students: A Multisite Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

Identity development is a central developmental task during emerging adulthood, and religiosity has been proposed as an important factor associated with this process. However, empirical evidence from the Indian context remains limited. This cross-sectional study examined the association between religiosity and positive self-identity among 2137 university students recruited from multiple institutions across India. Data were collected using a self-administered electronic questionnaire completed during scheduled classroom sessions. Pearson’s correlation and multiple linear regression analyses were performed, with the latter adjusted for socio-demographic characteristics. Religiosity showed a significant positive correlation with positive self-identity ($r = 0.390$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis revealed that after adjusting for covariates (age, gender, religion, family income, and place of birth), religiosity remained a significant independent predictor of positive self-identity ($\beta = 0.348$, $p < 0.001$). These findings indicate that higher religiosity is independently associated with greater positive self-identity, encompassing higher self-confidence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, ease of self-definition, and inner peace, among Indian university students. The study contributes context-specific evidence on the role of religiosity in positive identity development within the Indian socio-cultural setting.

Keywords: religiosity; positive self-identity; university students; India; emerging adulthood

1. Introduction

The transition from adolescence to early adulthood is a critical period of identity development during which individuals establish beliefs, values, social roles, and personal commitments that contribute to a coherent sense of self (Erikson 1968). During this period, identity develops through continuous interactions between individuals and their social and cultural environments. Among the many factors that may influence this process, religion has received considerable attention because it provides systems of beliefs, values, and practices through which individuals may interpret their experiences, develop a sense of belonging, and construct meaning in life (Weber [1905] 2003; King 2003; Greil and Davidman 2007). Although religion is only one of several influences on identity development, it may provide an important framework through which individuals understand themselves and their place in society.

Religion has been conceptualised as both a social institution and a system of beliefs centred on the sacred or the divine. From a sociological perspective, Durkheim viewed religion as an institution that promotes social cohesion and collective identity (Durkheim [1912] 2013, [1912] 1995). At the individual level, religion also includes beliefs in God or



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the divine together with the beliefs, values, and practices through which these beliefs are expressed (Hood et al. 2018). While religion broadly refers to organised systems of beliefs, practices, and traditions, religiosity refers to the extent to which individuals embrace, practise, and integrate these beliefs into their everyday lives (Breskaya and Giordan 2019; Giordan et al. 2020). Although religion, religiosity, and spirituality are related concepts, they are not synonymous. Religion generally refers to organised systems of beliefs and practices, whereas religiosity reflects the extent to which individuals hold and practise these beliefs. Spirituality, in contrast, may exist within or outside organised religion and generally refers to an individual's search for meaning, purpose, and connection with the transcendent (Hill and Pargament 2003). In the present study, religiosity was conceptualised as a multidimensional construct encompassing religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, belief in God, and the perceived significance and influence of these beliefs in everyday life.

Identity has been conceptualised from both psychological and sociological perspectives. Erikson (1968) described identity as a sense of continuity and coherence that develops through the exploration and integration of personal values, beliefs, and commitments. Sociological perspectives further emphasise that identity is shaped through interactions with others and the broader social environment (Cooley 1902; Mead 1934; Gleason 1983). Together, these perspectives indicate that identity is dynamic and continually negotiated through interactions between individuals and their social environments. Self-identity broadly refers to an individual's perception and evaluation of oneself, encompassing positive self-beliefs and a coherent sense of self (Baumeister 1999; Oyserman et al. 2012). Positive self-identity refers to a favourable and coherent sense of self characterised by positive self-evaluation, self-confidence, self-esteem, and a clear sense of personal values and direction, which contributes to healthy psychological development and well-being (Tsang et al. 2012). In the present study, positive self-identity was operationalised as an individual's positive perception of oneself, reflected through self-confidence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, ease of self-definition, and inner peace.

2. Literature Review

Several theoretical perspectives suggest that religion may be associated with identity development. Erikson proposed that belief systems and values provide an important framework during identity formation (Erikson 1968). King (2003) further argued that religion contributes to identity development by providing ideological, social, and spiritual contexts through which young people explore values, meaning, and personal commitments. Mol (1976) viewed identity as central to religion through the concept of the sacralisation of identity. Collectively, these perspectives suggest that religion may provide an ideological, social, and moral framework through which individuals develop and negotiate their identities. However, they do not imply that religiosity alone determines identity development, which is influenced by multiple individual and contextual factors.

Empirical studies have generally reported positive associations between religiosity and various aspects of self-concept and psychological well-being among adolescents and young adults. Greater religiosity has been associated with higher self-esteem, a stronger sense of purpose, greater resilience, and better psychological well-being (King 2003; Van Dyke and Elias 2007; Koenig et al. 2014; Hood et al. 2018; Li et al. 2016). Evidence from diverse cultural settings further supports these associations. For example, in the United States, longitudinal research has shown that greater religious involvement contributes to identity development during adolescence and predicts a stronger sense of purpose in emerging adulthood (Hardy et al. 2011), while religiosity has also been shown to promote identity commitment, meaning-making, and prosocial development during this critical developmental period (Furrow et al. 2004). A study conducted among Czech adolescents found that religiosity and spirituality

were positively associated with meaning in life, while positive images of God combined with higher spirituality were associated with greater self-esteem, highlighting the role of religious beliefs in fostering positive developmental outcomes (Kosarkova and Roubalova 2024). Similarly, among Malaysian university students, higher religious commitment was associated with greater happiness and more positive attitudes, with educational level moderating these relationships (Achour et al. 2017). Furthermore, a meta-analysis of 75 independent studies involving adolescents and emerging adults demonstrated that religiosity and spirituality were positively associated with psychological well-being and self-esteem across diverse populations (Yonker et al. 2012). Collectively, these findings suggest that religiosity may serve as an important psychosocial resource for fostering positive self-perceptions and identity development. Nevertheless, the strength and expression of these associations may vary across social and cultural settings, highlighting the need for context-specific evidence before findings can be generalised across populations (Gebauer and Sedikides 2021).

India provides a unique socio-cultural context for examining the relationship between religiosity and self-identity because religion continues to influence everyday life while rapid urbanisation, globalisation, and changing social values are reshaping the experiences of younger generations (Kapur 2017; Suchday et al. 2018). Adolescence and emerging adulthood represent critical periods for identity development. Emerging adulthood, characterised by exploration of identity, beliefs, and life directions, provides important opportunities for individuals to consolidate their values and sense of self (Erikson 1968; Arnett 2000, 2004). University students constitute an important subgroup within this developmental stage because higher education exposes them to diverse social environments, multiple belief systems, and interpersonal experiences that may influence identity development. Previous studies have suggested that changing socio-cultural environments may influence identity formation among Indian youth (Kaul 2012; Rosenmann et al. 2016; Rahim et al. 2021; Singh 2023). Within the Indian philosophical tradition, concepts related to self-awareness, self-reflection, and inner well-being have long been discussed in the Upanishads and Yoga philosophy (Chauhan and Kumar 2022; Srinivasan 2016; MacKenzie 2018). Although these philosophical perspectives differ from the psychological construct examined in the present study, they provide an important cultural context for understanding the relationship between religiosity and self-identity in India.

Given the religious and cultural diversity of India, findings from Western populations cannot be assumed to be directly applicable to the Indian context (Henrich et al. 2010; Sinha and Tripathi 1994). Although a growing body of research has examined religiosity and positive psychological functioning among Indian youth, studies specifically investigating identity-related outcomes remain limited. Existing evidence indicates that religiosity is positively associated with self-concept among Indian youth (Thakre et al. 2023), while religious orientation has been linked to religious identity salience and identity status among emerging adults (Siddiqui and Kapoor 2021). Similarly, studies among Indian university students have reported positive associations between religiosity and self-esteem, subjective well-being, happiness, and life satisfaction (Abdel-Khalek and Singh 2014). However, to our knowledge, no quantitative study has specifically examined the association between multidimensional religiosity and positive self-identity among Indian university students. Furthermore, most existing Indian studies have focused on spirituality or general psychological well-being (Deb and Strodl 2019) or have examined individual components such as self-concept or religious identity separately (Thakre et al. 2023; Siddiqui and Kapoor 2021), rather than investigating multidimensional religiosity in relation to positive self-identity as a unified construct. This highlights the need for context-specific evidence to

better understand the relationship between religiosity and positive self-identity among university students in India.

Therefore, the present study aimed to examine the association between religiosity and positive self-identity among university students in India. Drawing upon previous theoretical perspectives and empirical evidence, we hypothesised that higher religiosity would be positively associated with positive self-identity.

3. Methods

3.1. Study Design and Participants

A multisite cross-sectional study was conducted among university students enrolled in higher educational institutions across India between January and August 2023. Participants were recruited from universities located in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR), Ahmedabad (Gujarat), Bengaluru (Karnataka), and Mumbai (Maharashtra). University students were selected because they represent a population undergoing continued identity development while being exposed to diverse social, cultural, and religious environments during higher education.

Participants were eligible if they were enrolled in an Indian university, aged 18 years or above, and willing to provide informed consent. A non-probability sampling strategy was adopted. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the target population of university students, while convenience sampling was employed to recruit eligible participants who were available and willing to participate during the data collection period. A total of 2137 students were included in the final analysis.

3.2. Questionnaire Development and Pilot Testing

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed as part of an international collaborative research project with researchers from the University of Padova, Italy. The questionnaire was subsequently reviewed by subject experts to evaluate its content and cultural appropriateness before being adapted for use in the Indian socio-cultural context.

Prior to the main survey, the questionnaire was pilot tested online among 50 university students to assess its clarity, comprehensibility, and feasibility. Based on participant feedback, minor revisions were made to improve the wording, sequencing, and contextual appropriateness of selected questionnaire items before administration of the final questionnaire. Participants included in the pilot study were excluded from the final study.

The final questionnaire comprised 3 sections. The first section collected socio-demographic information, including age, gender, religion, citizenship, place of birth, parental educational attainment, family income, and academic information. The second section assessed religiosity and religious socialisation, and the third assessed positive self-identity.

3.3. Data Collection

Data were collected using an electronic questionnaire administered during scheduled classroom sessions after obtaining permission from the participating institutions. Before participation, students were informed about the objectives of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants before completion of the questionnaire. Participants completed the questionnaire independently, while investigators remained available throughout the data collection process to clarify queries whenever required.

3.4. Study Measures

(A) Socio-demographic variables

Information on participants' age, gender, religion, citizenship, place of birth, parental educational attainment, family income, and academic year of study was collected and included as socio-demographic covariates in the analyses.

(B) Religiosity

Religiosity was operationalised using items adapted from previously validated measures reported by Breskaya and Giordan (2019) and Giordan et al. (2020). The construct assessed multiple dimensions of religiosity, including self-perceived religiosity, spirituality, belief in God, the perceived significance of religious and spiritual beliefs, and the influence of these beliefs on daily life. The religiosity scale comprised seven items representing these dimensions, namely religious person, spiritual person, religious sense, spiritual sense, religious influence, spiritual influence, and belief in God. Responses to all religiosity items were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater religiosity.

(C) Positive self-identity

Positive self-identity was operationalised using items developed specifically for the present study to assess self-confidence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, ease of self-definition, and inner peace. The positive self-identity scale comprised five items representing these domains of positive self-perception. Responses to all self-identity items were recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), with higher scores indicating a more positive self-identity.

3.5. Psychometric Evaluation

Prior to the main analyses, the psychometric properties of the questionnaire were evaluated. Principal component analysis (PCA) with Direct Oblimin rotation was performed to examine the underlying component structure of the questionnaire. Components with eigenvalues >1 were retained, and items with factor loadings ≥ 0.40 were considered to load on a component. The suitability of the data for component analysis was assessed using the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of sphericity. Based on the identified component structure, composite variables representing the study constructs were generated for subsequent analyses. Internal consistency of the retained scales was assessed using Cronbach's alpha.

3.6. Statistical Analysis

Data were analysed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22. Descriptive statistics were used to summarise participants' socio-demographic characteristics and study variables. Continuous variables are presented as means and standard deviations, whereas categorical variables are presented as frequencies and percentages.

Pearson's correlation analysis was performed to examine the bivariate relationship between religiosity and positive self-identity. Subsequently, linear regression analysis was performed to examine the association between religiosity and positive self-identity before and after adjustment for age, gender, religious affiliation, family income, and place of birth. Religiosity was entered as the independent variable and positive self-identity as the dependent variable. Regression coefficients (B), standardised beta coefficients (β), standard errors (SE), and corresponding p -values were reported to evaluate the magnitude and statistical significance of the association. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

The study was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee of Department of Psychology, University of Campania "Luigi Vanvitelli". Permission to conduct the study

was obtained from the participating universities before data collection. Participation was voluntary, and electronic informed consent was obtained from all participants. No personally identifiable information was collected, and all responses were anonymised prior to analysis to ensure participant confidentiality.

4. Result

4.1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Study Participants

The socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants are presented in Table 1. A total of 2137 university students were included in the analysis. The mean age of the participants was 19.7 ± 2.6 years. The sample comprised 50.9% males, 48.5% females, and 0.6% participants identifying as another gender. More than half of the participants (57.1%) were aged 18–19 years, and 62.8% were enrolled in the first year of undergraduate study. The majority identified as Hindu (78.0%), belonged to middle-income families (84.6%), and reported an urban area of birth (68.0%).

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the study participants.

Characteristic	Category	<i>n</i>	%
Age group (years)	18–19	1221	57.1
	20–22	821	38.4
	23–25	83	3.9
	>25	10	0.5
Gender	Male	1087	50.9
	Female	1037	48.5
	Other	13	0.6
Year of study	Bachelor's 1st year	1341	62.8
	Bachelor's 2nd year	258	12.1
	Bachelor's 3rd year	352	16.5
	Master's/Other	186	8.7
Religion	Hinduism	1667	78.0
	Islam	180	8.0
	Christianity	137	6.4
	Sikhism	62	2.9
	Jainism	36	1.7
	Buddhism	12	0.6
	No religion	39	1.8
	Other	14	0.7
Family income	Middle	1807	84.6
	High	231	10.8
	Low	99	4.6
Place of birth	Urban	1453	68.0
	Suburban	477	22.3
	Rural	207	9.7

4.2. Construct Validity and Reliability of the Study Measures

The suitability of the data for factor analysis was confirmed by an excellent Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy (0.923) and a significant Bartlett’s test of sphericity ($\chi^2 = 29,199.009$, $df = 378$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the data were appropriate for principal component analysis (Table 2). Five components representing social identity, religiosity, caste identity, religious socialisation, and positive self-identity were extracted. Consistent with the objectives of the present study, only the religiosity and positive self-identity components were retained for subsequent analyses. The factor loadings of the retained constructs are presented in Table 3. Both retained scales demonstrated excellent internal consistency, with Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of 0.934 for religiosity and 0.890 for positive self-identity.

Table 2. Summary of the psychometric properties of the study measures.

Psychometric Property	Result
Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure	0.923
Bartlett’s test of sphericity	$\chi^2 = 29,199.009$
Degrees of freedom	378
Significance	<0.001
Number of components extracted	5
Components retained for the present study	Religiosity and Positive Self-Identity
Cronbach’s α (Religiosity)	0.934
Cronbach’s α (Positive Self-Identity)	0.890

Footnote: KMO = Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure of sampling adequacy; χ^2 = Chi-square statistic.

Table 3. Pattern matrix of the retained components following Principal Component Analysis.

Construct	Item	Religiosity	Positive Self-Identity
Religiosity	Spiritual sense	0.891	
	Religious sense	0.888	
	Religious influence	0.858	
	Spiritual influence	0.827	
	Spiritual person	0.788	
	Religious person	0.763	
	Belief in God	0.753	
Positive Self-Identity	Self-satisfaction		0.910
	Self-confidence		0.836
	Self-esteem		0.787
	Inner peace		0.752
	Self-definition		0.729

Footnote: Extraction method: Principal Component Analysis (PCA). Rotation method: Direct Oblimin with Kaiser Normalization. Rotation converged in eight iterations. Only factor loadings ≥ 0.40 are presented. Components labelled Religiosity and Positive Self-Identity were retained for subsequent analyses in accordance with the objectives of the present study.

4.3. Association Between Religiosity and Positive Self-Identity

Pearson’s correlation analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between religiosity and positive self-identity ($r = 0.390$, $p < 0.001$) (Table 4). As shown in Table 5, the unadjusted linear regression model (Model 1) showed that religiosity was

a significant positive predictor of positive self-identity ($B = 0.383$, 95% CI: 0.344–0.421; $\beta = 0.390$; $p < 0.001$), explaining 15.2% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.152$). After adjusting for age group, gender, religion, family income, and place of birth (Model 2), religiosity remained a significant independent predictor of positive self-identity ($B = 0.341$, 95% CI: 0.302–0.381; $\beta = 0.348$; $p < 0.001$). The adjusted model explained 21.8% of the variance in positive self-identity ($R^2 = 0.218$), indicating that the association between religiosity and positive self-identity persisted after accounting for socio-demographic characteristics.

Table 4. Pearson correlation between religiosity and positive self-identity.

Variables	Religiosity	Positive Self-Identity
Religiosity	1	
Positive Self-Identity	0.390 *	1

* Pearson's correlation coefficient; $p < 0.001$.

Table 5. Association between religiosity and positive self-identity: unadjusted and adjusted linear regression analyses.

Predictor Variables	B (95% CI)	β	p -Value
Model 1. Unadjusted			
Religiosity	0.383 (0.344, 0.421)	0.390	<0.001 *
Model fit statistics			
R^2	0.152		
Adjusted R^2	0.152		
F-statistic	F (1, 2120) = 380.60		<0.001 *
Model 2. Adjusted #			
Religiosity	0.341 (0.302, 0.381)	0.348	<0.001 *
Age Group (Ref: 18–19 years)			
20–22 years	−0.440 (−0.513, −0.366)	−0.493	<0.001 *
23–25 years	−0.603 (−0.792, −0.414)	−0.677	<0.001 *
>25 years	−0.445 (−0.947, 0.056)	−0.500	0.082
Gender (Ref: Male)			
Female	0.047 (−0.023, 0.116)	0.052	0.186
Other	0.525 (0.088, 0.962)	0.589	0.019 *
Religion (Ref: Hinduism)			
Islam	0.109 (−0.019, 0.236)	0.122	0.095
Christianity	0.248 (0.101, 0.396)	0.279	0.001 *
Sikhism	−0.027 (−0.228, 0.175)	−0.030	0.796
Jainism	−0.044 (−0.306, 0.218)	−0.049	0.742
Buddhism	−0.321 (−0.772, 0.130)	−0.361	0.163
Other/No religion	−0.029 (−0.259, 0.200)	−0.033	0.803
Family Income (Ref: Middle)			
Low	0.202 (0.036, 0.367)	0.226	0.017 *
High	−0.085 (−0.194, 0.024)	−0.096	0.127

Table 5. *Cont.*

Predictor Variables	B (95% CI)	β	<i>p</i> -Value
Place of Birth (Ref: Urban)			
Suburban	−0.040 (−0.124, 0.043)	−0.045	0.346
Rural	−0.040 (−0.161, 0.081)	−0.045	0.516
Model fit statistics			
R ²	0.218		
Adjusted R ²	0.212		
F-statistic	F(16, 2105) = 36.75		<0.001 *

* Significant at $p < 0.05$; # Model 2 adjusted for age group, gender, religion, family income, and place of birth. Abbreviations: *B*, unstandardized regression coefficient; β , standardized regression coefficient; CI, confidence interval; Ref, reference category.

5. Discussion

The present study examined the relationship between religiosity and positive self-identity among Indian university students and found that higher religiosity was associated with higher positive self-identity, including self-confidence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, ease of self-definition, and inner peace. Notably, this relationship remained evident after adjustment for socio-demographic characteristics, suggesting that the observed association was not attributable to differences in age, gender, religious affiliation, family income, or area of birth. This finding supports and extends the limited Indian evidence examining religiosity and identity-related constructs among youth. Previous Indian studies have shown that religiosity is positively associated with self-concept and identity development among emerging adults (Thakre et al. 2023; Siddiqui and Kapoor 2021). The present study extends this evidence by demonstrating that multidimensional religiosity is associated with the broader construct of positive self-identity among Indian university students. Together, these findings suggest that religiosity may function as one of several psychosocial resources supporting identity development during emerging adulthood, even when religious identity is not an individual's most salient identity domain.

The observed association may be understood within Erikson's psychosocial theory and Arnett's theory of emerging adulthood, which identify adolescence and emerging adulthood as critical periods of identity exploration, consolidation, and the development of a coherent sense of self (Erikson 1968; Arnett 2000, 2004). The present findings are consistent with these theoretical perspectives, suggesting that religiosity may support identity development by helping young adults interpret their experiences, establish personal values, and develop a coherent sense of self during this formative stage. They also align with King's (2003) proposition that religious engagement facilitates identity development by encouraging reflection on personal beliefs and commitments while fostering a sense of purpose, belonging, and responsibility towards others. Collectively, these perspectives suggest that religiosity may represent one of several psychosocial resources that support the development and maintenance of positive self-identity during emerging adulthood.

The present findings also align with a broader body of evidence linking religiosity with psychological well-being and identity-related outcomes. Rather than functioning solely as a system of beliefs and practices, religiosity has been associated with greater life satisfaction, resilience, optimism, psychological well-being, and a stronger sense of self (Hood et al. 2018; Van Dyke and Elias 2007; Koenig et al. 2014; Li et al. 2016). Religiosity has also been linked to moral identity, suggesting that its influence extends beyond emotional well-being to broader aspects of self-development (Kaur 2020). Longitudinal evidence further indicates that religiosity may contribute to identity formation over time rather than

merely reflecting an established sense of identity. Hardy et al. (2011) found that increasing religious involvement was associated with lower identity diffusion and greater identity achievement, while Furrow et al. (2004) linked religious self-understanding to personal meaning and prosocial personality. These observations are consistent with findings reported across diverse cultural settings. Kosarkova and Roubalova (2024) found positive associations between religiosity, self-esteem, and meaning in life among Czech adolescents despite the country's comparatively secular environment, while Achour et al. (2017) reported similar associations with self-esteem and positive attitudes among Malaysian university students. The overall pattern is further supported by Yonker et al.'s (2012) meta-analysis, which demonstrated significant positive associations between religiosity, self-esteem, and well-being across diverse populations. Within India, previous studies have similarly linked religiosity or spirituality with self-esteem, happiness, life satisfaction, and positive identity-related constructs (Abdel-Khalek and Singh 2014; Zaib and James 2023). Collectively, these findings reinforce the present results and suggest that the positive association between religiosity and identity-related outcomes is evident across diverse cultural settings. However, previous findings have not been entirely consistent. Deb and Strodl (2019) reported that spirituality, but not religiosity, was associated with quality of life among Indian university students, while Park and Kamble (2020) found that religious beliefs were associated with both meaning in life and higher levels of depression and anxiety. These inconsistencies suggest that the relationship between religiosity and psychological functioning may vary according to how religiosity is conceptualised, the outcomes examined, and the sociocultural context. Nevertheless, the present findings add to the growing evidence that religiosity is positively associated with psychological characteristics underpinning positive self-identity.

Several mechanisms may explain the observed relationship. Religiosity may provide individuals with stable systems of beliefs and values that facilitate meaning-making, encourage self-reflection, and promote psychological coherence. Participation in religious practices and communities may also strengthen social connectedness, perceived social support, and a sense of belonging, thereby reinforcing positive self-evaluation and emotional well-being. These interpretations are consistent with the theoretical framework proposed by Pargament (1997, 2013), which conceptualises religion as an important resource for meaning-making, psychological coping, and adaptation to life challenges. A complementary explanation is provided by the self-enhancement perspective proposed by Sedikides and Gebauer (2010). Their meta-analysis suggested that religiosity is associated with positive self-perceptions and may provide individuals with a favourable and internally consistent view of themselves. This mechanism may help explain why religiosity was associated with multiple dimensions of positive self-identity rather than a single aspect of self-evaluation. It may also partly explain why the association observed in the present study appears stronger than the small effect sizes reported by Yonker et al. (2012). Unlike many previous studies, the present study assessed religiosity as a multidimensional construct encompassing religious beliefs, spiritual beliefs, belief in God, and the perceived influence of these beliefs in daily life. Nevertheless, the mechanisms linking religiosity with positive self-identity were not directly examined in the present study and warrant further investigation using longitudinal and mixed-methods research.

The Indian socio-cultural context provides an important perspective for interpreting these findings. Religion continues to occupy a central place within family life, community relationships, and cultural traditions, where religious beliefs and practices are closely intertwined with social values and everyday experiences (Fuller 2004). This cultural embeddedness may partly explain why religiosity was positively associated with multiple dimensions of positive self-identity in the present study. Gebauer and Sedikides (2021)

argued that the psychological benefits of religiosity are amplified in societies where religion occupies a more central and normative role in everyday life. This interpretation is consistent with the comparatively smaller effect sizes reported among the predominantly Western and increasingly secular populations included in the meta-analysis by [Yonker et al. \(2012\)](#). Consequently, religiosity among Indian university students may shape identity not only through individual beliefs but also through shared family practices, cultural participation, and collective identity. These findings highlight the importance of examining identity development within its socio-cultural context rather than relying predominantly on evidence from Western societies.

Taken together, the present findings extend the limited evidence on the association between religiosity and positive self-identity among Indian university students. They also underscore the importance of examining identity development within its socio-cultural context.

The present study has several strengths. It included a large multisite sample of university students recruited from different geographical regions of India, enhancing the geographical representation of the study population. The questionnaire incorporated items adapted from previously validated measures of religiosity, and the retained constructs demonstrated a clear underlying component structure and good internal consistency following principal component analysis and reliability assessment. Furthermore, adjusted regression analyses enabled the association between religiosity and positive self-identity to be examined after accounting for relevant socio-demographic characteristics.

Several limitations should be acknowledged. First, the cross-sectional design does not permit conclusions regarding the temporal relationship between religiosity and positive self-identity. Second, the reliance on self-reported data introduces the possibility of recall and social desirability bias. Third, participants were recruited exclusively from universities using purposive and convenience sampling, resulting in a sample predominantly comprising urban and middle-income students. Compared with the general Indian population, university students may differ in their educational experiences, socioeconomic circumstances, and exposure to diverse belief systems, which may influence both religiosity and identity development. Accordingly, the findings should be interpreted as reflecting Indian university students rather than the wider youth population, and caution is warranted when generalising the results to rural youth or individuals from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, although several socio-demographic characteristics were considered, other factors such as personality, family environment, social support, and mental health may also influence positive self-identity and should be explored in future research.

The present findings provide directions for future research and have practical relevance for university settings. Future longitudinal studies are required to clarify the temporal relationship between religiosity and positive self-identity and to identify the psychological and social mechanisms underlying this association. Research involving more diverse populations, including non-student and rural youth, would further improve the generalisability of the findings. From a practical perspective, the findings suggest that religiosity and spirituality may represent important psychosocial resources that could be considered, alongside other social and psychological factors, in initiatives aimed at promoting positive identity development and psychological well-being among university students while recognising individual diversity and respecting religious pluralism.

6. Conclusions

This study examined the relationship between religiosity and positive self-identity among Indian university students using data from a large multisite sample. The findings demonstrated a positive association between religiosity and positive self-identity, characterised by higher levels of self-confidence, self-esteem, self-satisfaction, ease of self-

definition, and inner peace. This relationship remained evident after accounting for selected socio-demographic characteristics, highlighting the relevance of religiosity as a correlate of positive self-identity within this population.

The study contributes to the limited empirical evidence on religiosity and identity development in the Indian context and underscores the importance of considering socio-cultural factors when examining positive self-identity among university students. Future longitudinal and mixed-methods studies involving more diverse populations are needed to clarify the temporal nature of this relationship and to explore the psychological and social mechanisms through which religiosity may be related to positive self-identity.

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Data Availability Statement: The datasets presented in this article are not readily available because the data are part of an ongoing study. Requests to access the datasets should be directed to the corresponding author.

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