Open Access

ANALYSIS OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY AMONG PRISONERS IN BUCARAMANGA PRISONS

INTI RAÚL CUADROS-CAGUA
CORPORACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA ADVENTISTA

GUSTAVO ANDRÉS IBARRA-BETANCUR
CORPORACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA ADVENTISTA

HEILER GÜICÓN-BARRERA
CORPORACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA ADVENTISTA

ALBERT RODRÍGUEZ-PARRA
CORPORACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA ADVENTISTA

SARAY GALEANO-OSPINO
CORPORACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA ADVENTISTA

LUZ MARCELA RESTREPO-TAMAYO
UNIVERSIDAD DE MEDELLÍN

Abstract: Spirituality and religiosity are fundamental elements in human life, and even more so in the prison context. The presence of religious groups and chaplaincies in prisons has been a reality in Latin American countries, but there is a gap in the scientific literature regarding how a specific spiritual intervention can directly influence the religiosity of prisoners. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze spirituality and religiosity in incarcerated individuals through spiritual and religious assistance in two prisons in Bucaramanga, Colombia. To this end, a quantitative methodology with a correlational design was used, applying the ASPIRES and Age Universal I-E-12 scales to a sample of 209 inmates selected for convenience. The results revealed that spirituality and religiosity in this population, after a spiritual and religious intervention, are not superficial practices but are deeply internalized. Also, the religiosity of the participants is significantly related to intrinsic orientation, indicating that faith is perceived as an internal guide for life. It was also found that the practice of prayer is positively associated with universality and connectedness. Furthermore, it was found that spiritual interventions can be a significant tool for personal growth, comfort, and stability in the prison environment, acting as a personal resource of great importance to inmates.
Keywords: Religiosity, spirituality, incarcerated individuals, intrinsic orientation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Spirituality and religiosity are often considered synonymous, but they have different meanings. Spirituality refers to universal human needs and may or may not include specific religious beliefs, and it offers a guiding philosophy or perspective for an individual's choices. Skowroński (2016) states that spirituality is an important aspect of human life. On the other hand, religion encompasses a group or system of beliefs that includes concepts such as the supernatural, the sacred, or the divine; moral codes; practices; values; institutions; and rituals associated with these beliefs (J. C. Santos et al., 2022).

Various studies conceptualize spirituality from multiple approaches. For example, Reyes et al. (2017) define it as a fundamental and dynamic dimension of human life, focused on values, ethics, the search for meaning, and transcendence. For his part, Flores Escobar (2017) establishes a distinction between spirituality and religiosity. For him, spirituality is a personal experience oriented toward transcendence, while religiosity is a group- and organized-based practice of belief in a higher being. The author concludes that both concepts contribute to integral development and an attitude of peace. On the other hand, Skowroński (2016) points out that spirituality is often identified with faith and religiosity.

Regarding religiosity, Saldías-Ortega & Moyano-Díaz (2023) indicate that it is an attitude and behavior that guides life and actions, as well as the search for meaning. Its common denominator would be the belief in a transcendent reality and a divine being, and it would be linked to the understanding of the world and to how people relate to each other. Flores Escobar (2017) distinguishes between two types of religiosities: extrinsic and intrinsic. The former refers to ritual practices and institutional religions, while the latter concerns an intimate relationship with God, spirituality as such.

Considering the above, it has been identified that religious organizations impact both society and other social organizations in which religious people participate. Durigan (2014) considers the church's role fundamental to society, as it receives God's love by caring for one another. Political ideology, prejudices, and family decisions are influenced by the religious denomination to which people belong. Furthermore, religion significantly influences how people educate themselves, their children, manage their finances, and plan their families (Quintero, 2020). In this way, spirituality plays a significant role in the lives of people deprived of their liberty, as Hylton (2022) states, they often experience a profound existential spiritual struggle during incarceration. Therefore, the importance of studying spirituality and religiosity lies in their relevance across a wide range of aspects of people's lives and well-being (Saldías-Ortega & Moyano-Díaz, 2023).

The presence of religious groups in prisons is a reality in Latin American countries. Various studies have examined the role of different religious groups in the development of spirituality and religiosity among prisoners. For example, Rambal Simanca et al. (2024) analyzed the role of religious education in the human development of women in a Colombian prison. The study's findings showed that religious education is used as a control mechanism that promotes obedience and submission, turning obstacles into opportunities for personal growth. On the other hand, Thompson (2022) analyzes how evangelical Christian networks in Brazil have become an essential infrastructure for the country's penal system. The main results of this study indicate that these evangelical networks mobilize resources such as water, construction materials, and food, allowing them to supplement and, in some cases, replace government functions.

Also, Sitarz et al. (2022) analyzed Polish society's perception of freedom of religion for persons deprived of liberty, treating it as both a criminal and a humanitarian right. The study highlights the importance of religion and spirituality for prisoners, as these practices satisfy higher-order spiritual needs. On the other hand, Mansilla et al. (2024) analyzed how the social and symbolic resources that intra-prison Pentecostalism provided to inmates and converts supported their community reintegration. Pentecostalism redefined religious rituals (prayer, music, and preaching), transforming them into meaningful work. Prayer is considered a work of sacrifice that channels violence, music is a liberating work, and preaching is the work that allows the community to grow. The results showed that these communities offered a path to reintegration, both within and beyond prison, through a sense of belonging and biographical re-signification.

Additionally, dos Santos et al. (2023) identified the prevalence and level of hopelessness, as well as its correlation with symptoms of depression and anxiety, in women incarcerated in a prison in Alagoas, Brazil. The results revealed that hopelessness was associated with unfavorable socioeconomic factors, such as not having studied, not having a profession, not having a religion, and not performing work activities during incarceration. It was also identified that women with symptoms of depression and anxiety had higher levels of hopelessness. Khan (2025) adds that strengthening these factors can help rehabilitate prisoners.

Despite the growing attention to the influence of religious groups in the prison system and the relevance of spirituality to people's well-being, Michaelson et al. (2019) add that spirituality is considered the fourth dimension of health studied in adolescents in their psycho-spiritual factors as solid and conscious associations, but there is still a shortage of studies that specifically analyze spirituality and religiosity in incarcerated individuals after a spiritual intervention. Although the roles of education and religious networks in human development and in the provision of resources in prisons have been examined, and the correlation between religiosity and variables such as hopelessness has been explored, this gap in the scientific literature persists. This lack of research prevents us from understanding how a specific religious intervention can directly influence prisoners' spirituality and religiosity orientations.

Considering the above, the objective of this research is to analyze the spirituality and religiosity of prisoners through spiritual assistance in two prisons in Bucaramanga. To this end, a quantitative correlational design methodology was used to analyze spirituality and religiosity in a convenience sample of 209 prisoners. A questionnaire assessing Spirituality and Religious Feelings (ASPIRES) (Piedmont, 2012) and religious orientations was administered, using the Age Universal I-E-12 scale (Simkin & Etchezahar, 2013). The statistical analysis, performed in R, included calculating Cronbach's alpha to assess the instrument's reliability, descriptive analyses using relative frequencies, and Spearman's rank correlation to assess relationships among the study variables.

The results show that after a religious intervention in the study subjects, it was found that the religiosity of the participants is significantly related to intrinsic orientation, that is, faith is perceived as an internal guide, rather than a simple social practice. Furthermore, in relation to spiritual transcendence, prayer was positively associated with universality and connectivity, suggesting that this practice is linked to perceptions of interconnection and the maintenance of transcendent bonds. Furthermore, intrinsic orientation showed a moderate correlation with personal extrinsic orientation, suggesting that internal commitment to faith coexists with the search for personal comfort through prayer. However, social extrinsic orientation showed weak correlations, confirming its secondary role in the sample's spirituality.

Given the elements described above, this article is organized as follows: Section 2 describes the method used in this research. Section 3 presents the results obtained, which are analyzed in Section 4. Finally, section 5 presents the conclusions and describes future lines of research.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

Intervention Strategy Design

The intervention strategy is designed to support prisoners through spiritual and religious assistance in two prisons in Bucaramanga. This assistance is institutional in nature and based on the guidelines of the Pastoral Training School (Ceballos, 2000). To achieve this objective, the Master Plan for Spiritual Development in Prisons (PMDEC) was designed, based on the guidelines of the Master Plan for Educational Development of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (IASD, 2021). Khan (2025) reports that 60.2% of respondents considered the need to change their value system through religion a form of adaptation. The PMDEC is considered an intervention program.

The PMDEC is a collaborative project involving the entire prison community: inmates, their families, guards, administrators, officials, volunteer religious leaders, and the chaplain. The chaplain is a minister who provides spiritual support to people of any faith. In a prison setting, having a chaplain offers inmates the opportunity to enrich their spiritual experience. This relationship between the chaplain and the incarcerated person fosters mutual learning and growth, promoting unity and spiritual development on both sides.

To initiate the strategy, the spiritual team promotes spiritual accompaniment in the prison. Participants who are incarcerated may choose whether to participate in this process. Once their participation is confirmed, an attendance list is drawn up with their names. During the first visit, the chaplain conducts an individual interview to categorize each inmate and identify their spiritual needs based on their principles, beliefs, and values. Based on the results of this interview, and focusing on the most common need, a schedule of activities is drawn up as defined by the PMDEC.

Once each person's needs have been classified, an individual care plan is developed based on the categories of the Spiritual Assistance Scale (SAC). This scale was developed by Iván Omaña to categorize the type of help needed in response to a spiritual crisis (Cuadros Cagua et al., 2023). The categories defined by this scale are not progressive, and the patient may present several of them.

The individual care plan (chaplaincy) is a religious approach to rehabilitating offenders (Khan, 2025). This plan is implemented through Teotherapy (Braam & Koenig, 2019; Krmpotic, 2016). A face-to-face meeting is scheduled in which the chaplain and the inmate engage in a Socratic dialogue; therefore, it is patient-centered spiritual care (Bravin et al., 2019). The goal is to record the interview as a case study, following the action, reflection, and reaction method. The central premise of this care plan is that each person has a story that can be connected to God's story. Finally, the care plan is monitored to ensure its effectiveness and make any necessary adjustments.

Participants

Regarding the concept of sampling in research, Hernández Sampieri et al. (2016) emphasize that it is "a subgroup of the population of interest on which data will be collected, and which must be precisely defined and delimited in advance, as well as being representative of the population." In this research, the sample comprised 209 individuals deprived of liberty in prisons in Bucaramanga, 167 men and 42 women. The men were from the medium-security prison (CPMSBUC), and the women were from El Buen Pastor prison.

The sample for this research was selected for convenience: individuals deprived of liberty who were interested in participating in religious activities and who had authorization from the institutions' administrators to attend the event. Thus, the selection was based on practical and availability factors, characteristics typical of non-probabilistic convenience sampling.

Instruments

To assess spirituality, a survey was designed consisting of two instruments: the ASPIRES Scale, a questionnaire that assesses spirituality and religious feelings (Piedmont, 2012), and the Age Universal I-E-12 Scale (Simkin & Etchezahar, 2013), which assesses religious orientation. For this study, the Spanish adaptation of Simkin (2017) was used, which has shown good psychometric properties in the Ibero-American context.

The ASPIRES scale consists of 35 items and measures two main dimensions: Religious Feelings and Spiritual Transcendence. The Religious Feelings dimension consists of two subscales: Religious Participation (items 1-8) and Religious Crisis (items 9-12). The Spiritual Transcendence dimension, meanwhile, consists of three additional subscales: Prayer Fulfillment, which measures items 16, 20, 24, 29, 31, and 33, with reverse items in positions 13, 14, 23, and 30; Universality, which considers items 15, 17, 18, 25, 27, 28, 32, with reverse items in positions 25 and 27; and Connectivity, which comprises items 19, 21, 22, and 34, with reverse items in positions 26 and 35.

The scale uses a Likert-type response format with 5 to 7 response options. Scores are assigned according to the orientation of the item: positively worded items are scored from 5 (strongly agree) to 1, while negatively worded items are scored from 1 to 5, where 5 corresponds to "strongly disagree."

The Age Universal I-E-12 Scale consists of 12 items, distributed across three subscales: Intrinsic Orientation (6 items), Personal Extrinsic (3 items), and Social Extrinsic (3 items). A 5-point Likert-type response format is used, where 5 equals "Strongly agree" and 1 equals "Strongly disagree."

Additionally, demographic data such as gender, age, marital status, educational level, participation in prison activities, and religion were collected. Table 1 details each of the items for each scale and the dimensions they assess.

Table 1 *Instrument for measuring spirituality and religiosity in persons deprived of liberty*

Instrument	Dimension	Items
Demographic Data		Gender Age Marital status Level of education attained prior to entering prison: Are you currently participating in any activities within the prison? Religion or Belief
Spirituality and Religious Feelings Evaluation Scale (ASPIRES)	Religious Feelings	1. How often do you read the Bible? 2. How often do you read religious literature other than the Bible? 3. How often do you pray? 4. How often do you attend religious services? 5. To what extent do you have a personal, unique, intimate relationship with God? 6. Do you have experiences in which you feel unity with God and attain spiritual truth? 7. How important are your religious beliefs to you? 8. During the last 12 months, your religious interests and commitments... 9. I feel that God is punishing me. 10. I feel abandoned by God. 11. I feel isolated from others who share my faith 12. I cannot or do not want to involve God in the decisions I make about my life
	Spiritual transcendence	13. I have not experienced a deep sense of fulfillment and happiness through my prayers, meditations, and/or contemplations 14. I do not feel a connection to a higher Being or Reality 15. I do not believe that my life is connected in any way to all of humanity 16. I meditate and/or pray in order to reach a higher spiritual plane 17. All life is interconnected 18. There is an order in the universe that transcends human thought 19. Death truly ends emotional closeness with another 20. In the tranquility of my prayers and/or meditation, I feel a sense of fulfillment 21. I have done things in my life because I believed that a deceased relative or friend would have liked it 22. Although they are deceased, memories and thoughts of some of my relatives continue to influence my current life 23. Spirituality is not a central part of my life 24. I find inner strength and/or peace in my prayers and/or meditations 25. Although there is basically good and evil in people, I believe that humanity as a whole is particularly evil 26. I do not have strong emotional ties to anyone who has died. 27. There is no higher plane of consciousness or spirituality that unites all people 28. Although some people can be difficult, I feel an emotional bond with all of humanity 29. I meditate and/or pray in order to grow as a person 30. Prayer and/or meditation do not hold much appeal for me 31. My prayers or meditation give me a sense of emotional support 32. I feel that on a higher level we all share a common bond 33. I want to get closer to the God I believe in

Open Access

Instrument	Dimension	Items
		34. Recognition from others gives me deep satisfaction for my achievements 35. I don't care about the expectations my loved ones have of me
Age Universal IE Religious Orientation Scale	Intrinsic Orientation	1. My entire approach to life is based on my religion 2. I strive to live my life according to my religious beliefs 3. I have often had a strong sense of God's presence 4. My religion is important because it gives me answers to many questions about the meaning of life 5. I enjoy reading about my religion 6. It is important for me to spend time thinking and praying in private
	Extrinsic social orientation	7. I go to church mainly to spend time with my friends 8. I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing people I know there 9. I go to church because it helps me make friends
	Personal extrinsic orientation	10. I pray mainly to get relief and protection 11. What religion offers me primarily is relief in times of trouble and sadness 12. Praying is for obtaining peace and happiness

Source: Own elaboration based on Piedmont (2012) and Simkin (2017).

Data analysis

First, Cronbach's alpha coefficient is calculated (Frias-Navarro, 2006). Cronbach's alpha (α) is a measure of the reliability or internal consistency of a set of items on a scale. Its value ranges from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater internal consistency among the items. Next, a descriptive analysis of the data is performed for each section of the instrument, using graphs and tables of relative frequencies given the categorical nature of the variables in the selected instruments.

In addition, it is possible to perform a correlation analysis between the variables. If normality is satisfied, Pearson's correlation coefficient can be used; otherwise, Spearman's correlation coefficient is recommended (Wohlin et al., 2012). Therefore, this research adopted a quantitative approach and used a correlational design. This type of study aims to establish how two or more variables relate to each other. It also allows determining whether there is no apparent relationship between the variables examined in the sample. According to Hernández-Sampieri et al. (2016), "to assess the degree of association between two or more variables, correlational studies first measure each of these variables and then quantify, analyze, and establish the links." All statistical analyses were performed with R software (version 4.2.0) using the following packages: reshape2, effsize, dplyr, tidyr, psych, ggplot2, and corrplot.

3. RESULTS

The following sections present the results related to the participants' sociodemographic data. Subsequently, the findings of the instruments of spirituality, religious feelings, and religious orientation are detailed. Finally, an analysis of the relationships among the dimensions measured by the selected instruments is presented.

Demographic Data Analysis

The characterization of the sample of 209 inmates in Bucaramanga prisons, consisting of 167 men (79.9%) and 42 women (20.1%), based on age profile, marital status, length of imprisonment, educational level, participation in activities, and religious affiliation, is presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1 *Demographic data*
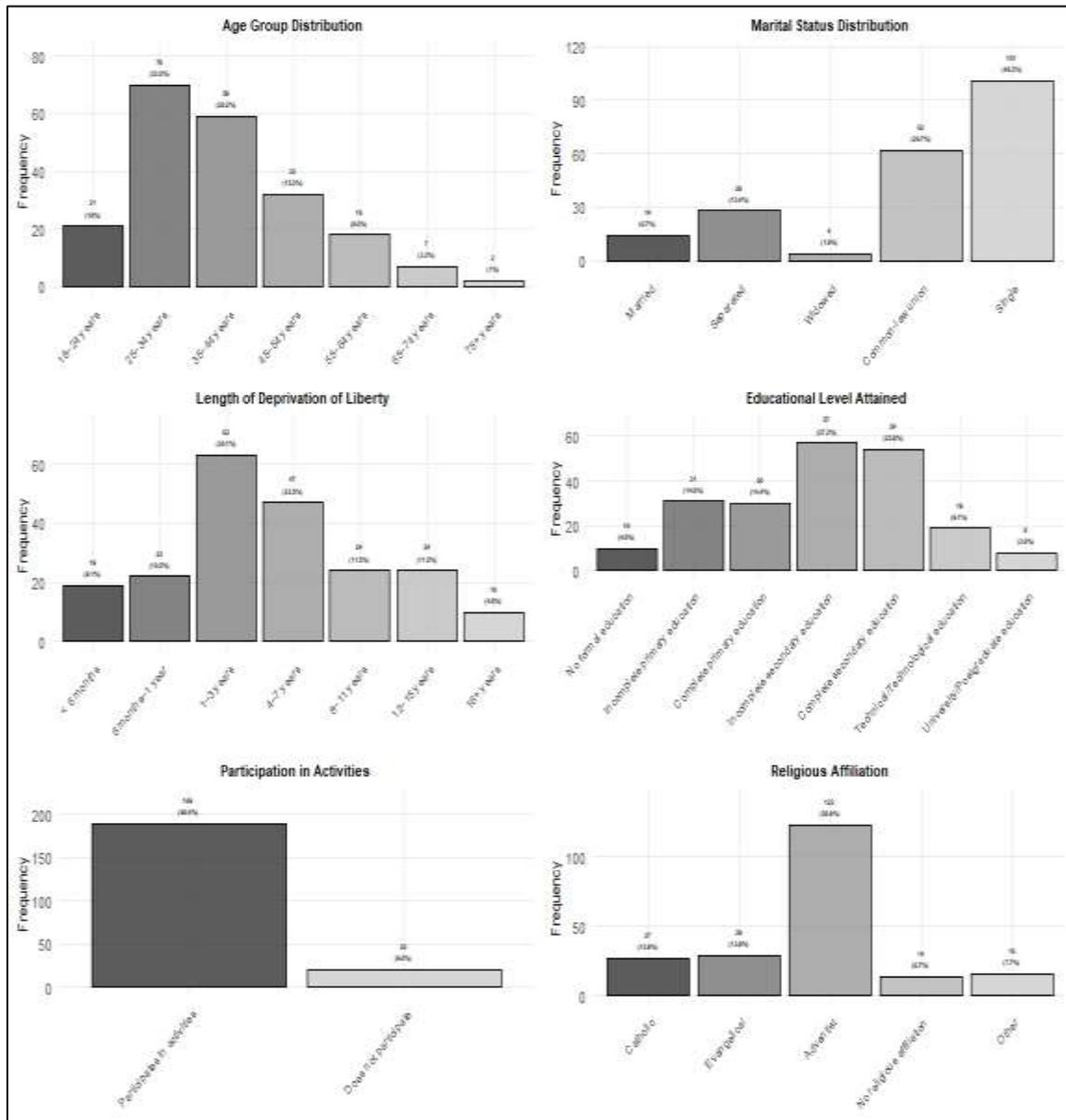
According to Figure 1, the sample is concentrated among young and middle-aged adults, with the 18-24 (33.5%) and 25-34 (28.2%) age groups predominating, followed by the 35-44 (17.7%) age group. The older age groups (55 years and older) represent less than 10% of the sample. By marital status, single people (49.3%) and those in domestic partnerships (29.7%) predominate, while married people make up 13.4%. The categories of separated and widowed show lower frequencies (5.3% and 1.9%, respectively). On the other hand, most participants were incarcerated for 1-3 years (27.3%) and 4-7 years (22.0%). Nineteen-point one percent have been incarcerated for less than one year, while the remaining 31.6% are distributed among those who have been in prison for 8 years or more.

About educational characteristics, those who have completed secondary school (22.0%) and those who have not completed secondary school (17.2%) predominate, followed by those who have completed primary school (16.7%). It is noteworthy that only 3.8% report attending university, while 9.1% have no formal education. Most participants (90.4%) participate in prison programs (studies, rehabilitation, workshops, spiritual programs, or work), demonstrating a high level of involvement in institutional activities. Finally, there is marked religious diversity, with a predominance of Adventist affiliation (58.9%), followed by Catholics (12.9%) and Evangelicals (13.9%). Some 6.7% do not profess any religion, while 7.7% report other religious affiliations.

ASPIRES Analysis

The Assessment Scale of Spirituality and Religious Feelings (ASPIRES) is an instrument designed to measure religious and spiritual constructs across different religious traditions (Piedmont, 2012). The instrument assesses two main dimensions: religious feelings (which include religious participation and crisis) and spiritual transcendence (which includes fulfillment in prayer, universality, and connectivity) (Simkin, 2017). The following subsections address the results related to the two dimensions of this instrument.

ASPIRES - Religious Feelings

Figure 2 reports the results of questions related to reading religious texts. On the religiosity scale, reading the Bible is an ingrained habit: the "every day" category accounts for most responses, followed by "several times a week." On the other hand, "every day" and "several times a week" predominate in religious literature, although there is an increase in lower frequencies, such as "never" or "1-2 times a year."

Figure 2 *Reading religious texts*
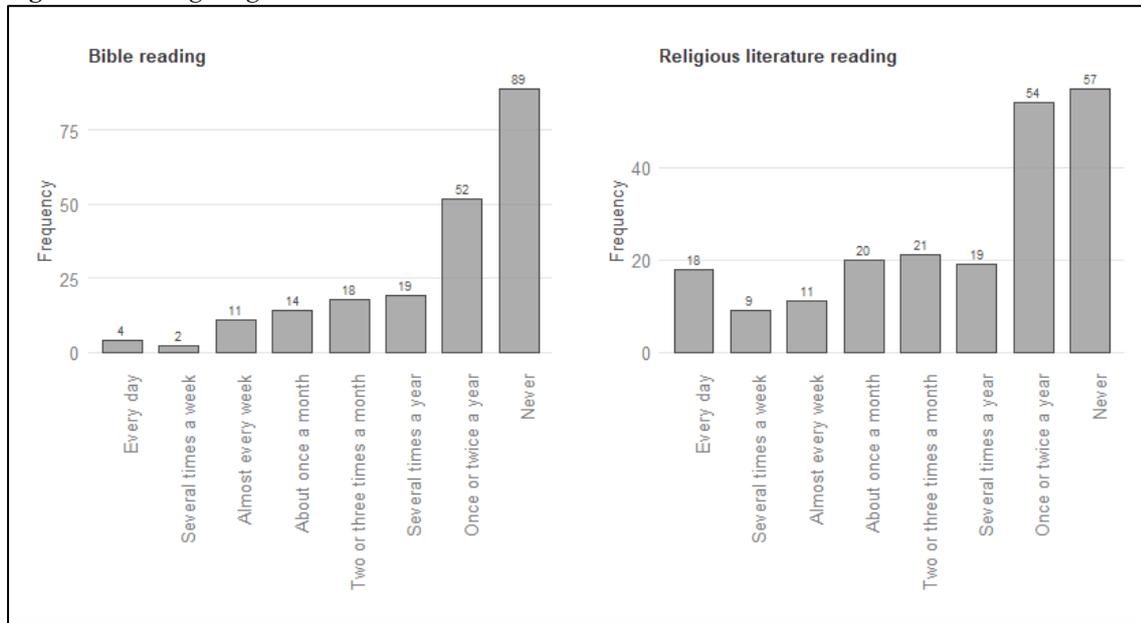
About religious practices, there is a marked contrast (Figure 3). The frequency of prayer is low: most respondents indicated "never," and the categories of daily or weekly practice are underrepresented. In contrast, attendance at religious services shows a different pattern, with a high concentration in "frequently" and "very frequently," and a reduced presence of those who attend rarely or never. This suggests that although personal prayer practice is scarce, community participation in religious acts carries considerable weight in participants' spiritual experience.

Figure 3 *Religious practices*
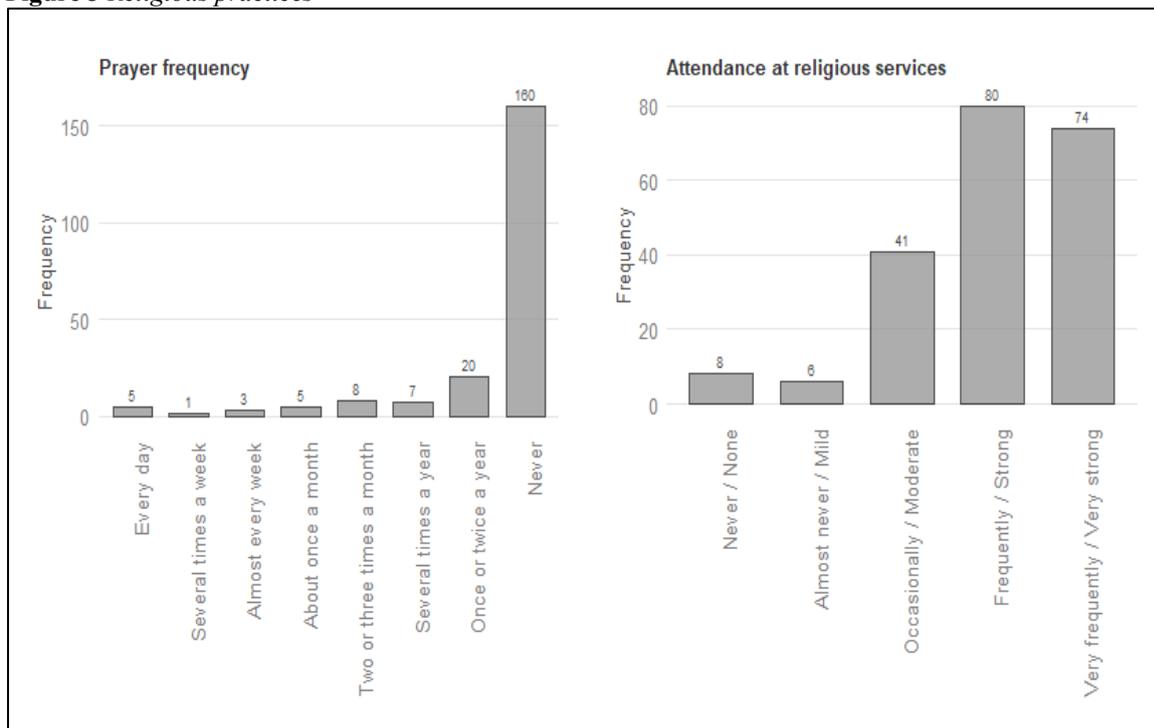
On the other hand, regarding spiritual experiences, the majority of respondents (131; 62.7%) report having a "strong" or "very strong" personal relationship with God. Something similar occurs with experiences of unity with God, as the responses "frequently" and "very frequently" predominate, indicating that a large proportion of participants report moments of intense spiritual connection (Figure 4).

Figure 4 *Spiritual relationships*
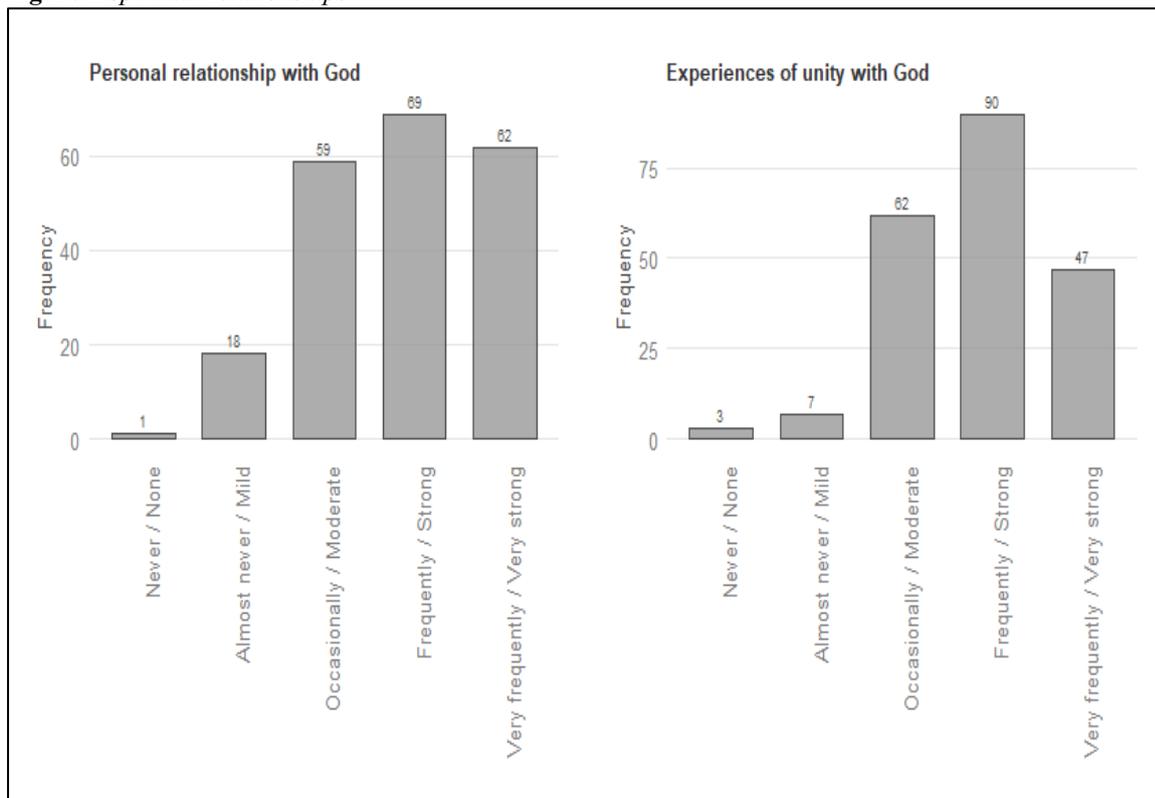
Considering the results on the importance of religious beliefs, most participants (156 – 74.6%) consider their beliefs very important or extremely important, and only a small number rate them as low in importance. Similarly, when asked about recent changes in religious commitment, more than 60% of participants perceive an increase, while a smaller group reports stability and only a few report a decrease (Figure 5).

Figure 5 *Importance and changes*
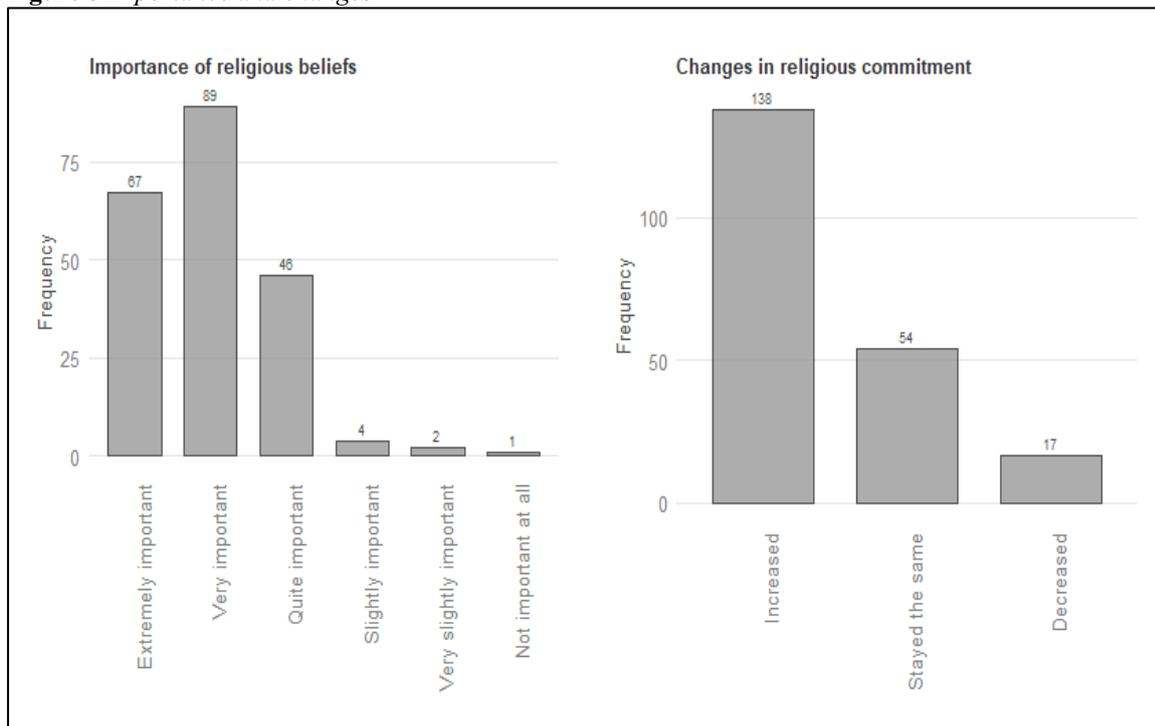
The first section of questions in the instrument used in this study ends with four questions related to the religious crisis. According to the results shown in Figure 6, most respondents disagree with the statements about a religious crisis. In all items, the most frequent option is "strongly disagree," with frequencies higher than the other categories. Thus, the results suggest that, although some participants report tensions in their spiritual experience, the general tendency is not to perceive abandonment, punishment, or distancing from God.

Figure 6 *Religious crisis*
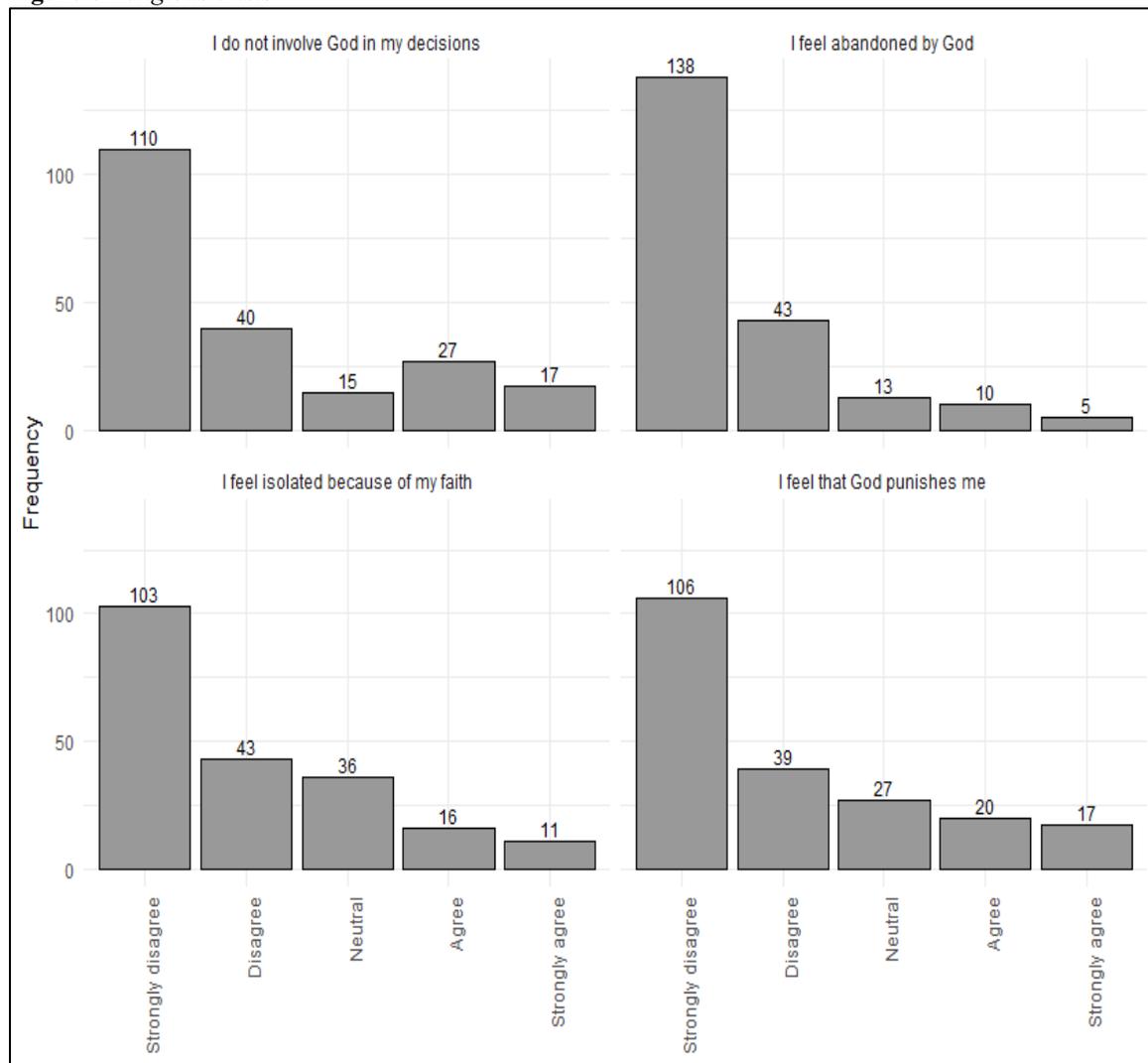
ASPIRES is an instrument that has been validated in multiple studies, supporting its theoretical structure and its relevance for measuring the dimension of religious feelings (Piotrowski et al., 2021). Although it is a previously validated instrument, Cronbach's alpha values indicate internal consistency in this sample (Frias-Navarro, 2006). In this case, the Cronbach's alpha coefficients obtained for the Religiosity Scale (0.63), Religious Crisis (0.64), and total Religious Feelings (0.62) reflect moderate internal consistency. Although these values are below the 0.70 threshold typically considered desirable in confirmatory studies, they are acceptable in exploratory contexts (Cronbach, 1951). Thus, the observed values do not call into question the instrument's validity; rather, they reflect the inherent complexity of the constructs evaluated, in which religious and spiritual experiences tend to be diverse and difficult to capture with high homogeneity across items.

ASPIRES - Spiritual Transcendence

The second part of the ASPIRES instrument addresses spiritual transcendence based on three variables: prayer fulfillment, universality, and connectivity. The item results for each variable are reported in Table 2.

Table 2 *ASPIRE Results: Spiritual Transcendence*

Variable	Item	No response	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Prayer fulfillment	I have not experienced a deep sense of fulfillment and happiness through my prayers, prayers, and/or meditations.		31 (14.83%)	34 (16.27%)	19 (9.09%)	74 (35.41%)	51 (24.40%)

Varia-ble	Item	No res-ponse	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	I do not feel a connection with a higher Being or Reality		24 (11.48%)	18 (8.61%)	18 (8.61%)	83 (39.71%)	66 (31.58%)
	I meditate and/or pray to be able to		110 (52.63%)	72 (34.45%)	9 (4.31%)	7 (3.35%)	11 (5.26%)
	In the tranquility of my prayers and/or meditation, I feel a sense of fulfillment.		102 (48.80%)	84 (40.19%)	10 (4.78%)	7 (3.35%)	6 (2.87%)
	Spirituality is not a central part of my life		25 (11.96%)	25 (11.96%)	14 (6.70%)	62 (29.67%)	83 (39.71%)
	I find inner strength and/or peace in my prayers and/or meditations	1 (0.48%)	141 (67.46%)	53 (25.36%)	7 (3.35%)	4 (1.91%)	3 (1.44%)
	I meditate and/or pray to grow as a person		137 (65.55%)	54 (25.84%)	6 (2.87%)	7 (3.35%)	5 (2.39%)
	Prayer and/or meditation do not appeal to me very much		35 (16.75%)	29 (13.88%)	16 (7.66%)	69 (33.01%)	60 (28.71%)
	My prayers or meditation give me a sense of emotional support		120 (57.42%)	56 (26.79%)	8 (3.83%)	20 (9.57%)	5 (2.39%)
	I want to get closer to the God I believe in		147 (70.33%)	48 (22.97%)	6 (2.87%)	2 (0.96%)	6 (2.87%)
Univer-sality	I do not believe that my life is connected in any way to all of humanity	1 (0.48%)	22 (10.53%)	30 (14.35%)	38 (18.18%)	71 (33.97%)	47 (22.49%)
	All life is interconnected		88 (42.11%)	71 (33.97%)	22 (10.53%)	22 (10.53%)	6 (2.87%)
	There is order in the universe		105 (50.24%)	54 (25.84%)	19 (9.09%)	17 (8.13%)	14 (6.70%)
	Although there is basically good and evil in people, I believe that humanity in		25 (11.96%)	39 (18.66%)	33 (15.79%)	65 (31.10%)	47 (22.49%)
	There is no higher plane of consciousness or spirituality that unites all people.		42 (20.10%)	35 (16.75%)	15 (7.18%)	42 (20.10%)	75 (35.89%)
	Although some people may be difficult, I feel an emotional bond with		90 (43.06%)	72 (34.45%)	25 (11.96%)	16 (7.66%)	6 (2.87%)
	I feel that on a higher level we all share a common bond		102 (48.80%)	75 (35.89%)	15 (7.18%)	8 (3.83%)	9 (4.31%)

Varia-ble	Item	No response	Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Con-necti-vity	Death truly ends emotional closeness with another person		65 (31.10%)	51 (24.40%)	30 (14.35%)	42 (20.10%)	21 (10.05%)
	I have done things in my life because I thought a relative or friend would like it.		25 (11.96%)	35 (16.75%)	22 (10.53%)	82 (39.23%)	45 (21.53%)
	Although they have passed away, memories and thoughts of some of my relatives continue to influence my current life.		47 (22.49%)	78 (37.32%)	21 (10.05%)	28 (13.40%)	35 (16.75%)
	I do not have strong emotional ties to someone who has died		61 (29.19%)	45 (21.53%)	20 (9.57%)	40 (19.14%)	43 (20.57%)
	The recognition of others gives me deep satisfaction for my achievements.		95 (45.45%)	74 (35.41%)	15 (7.18%)	13 (6.22%)	12 (5.74%)
	I don't care about the expectations my loved ones have of me		39 (18.66%)	35 (16.75%)	32 (15.31%)	48 (22.97%)	55 (26.32%)

The results on the fulfillment of prayer indicate a tendency toward positive assessments of spiritual practice. Most participants report finding fulfillment, inner peace, and personal growth in prayer or meditation (more than 60% in several items). Similarly, a high percentage indicates that prayer provides them with emotional support and a closeness to God (70.33%). In contrast, negative statements ("spirituality is not central to my life" or "prayer is not appealing") show disagreement levels of 60% to 70%, suggesting a spiritual dimension in respondents' lives. Regarding Universality, there is a favorable orientation toward perceiving interconnection with humanity and the universe. The majority agree that "all life is interconnected" (76%) and that there is a universal order (76.08%). Positive responses to the idea of sharing a common bond with others also predominate (84.69%). On the other hand, when negative statements are made, such as the non-existence of a higher plane of consciousness, participants tend to disagree (35.89%), reinforcing the idea that, for many, there is indeed a transcendent dimension that connects people.

Finally, regarding Connectivity, a significant proportion of participants acknowledge that memories of deceased relatives continue to influence their lives (59.81%) and that achievements recognized by others generate satisfaction (80.86%). However, the statement that "death ends emotional closeness" divides opinion, with 55.5% agreeing or being neutral, compared to 30% who disagree. Something similar occurs with family expectations: although a considerable proportion (35.41%) indicates they do not care, an equivalent percentage (49.29%) disagrees, revealing tensions between personal autonomy and bonds with others.

Internal consistency analysis using Cronbach's alpha indicates that Prayer Fulfillment ($\alpha = 0.72$) has acceptable reliability, while Universality ($\alpha = 0.54$) and Connectivity ($\alpha = 0.43$) show less homogeneity in responses, reflecting diverse perceptions of these constructs. However, the overall dimension of Spiritual Transcendence achieves an alpha of 0.75, supporting the instrument's robustness in general use.

Analysis of the Age Universal I-E-12 Scale

The last section of the instrument in this study investigates religious orientations using the Age Universal I-E-12 scale (Simkin & Etchezahar, 2013). This aspect is addressed from three variables: intrinsic orientation, extrinsic social orientation, and extrinsic personal orientation. The results related to this variable are presented in Table 3.

Table 3 *Results - Age Universal I-E-12 Scale*

Varia-ble	Item	No res-ponse	Not im-portant	Of little impor-tance	Modera-tely im-portant	Impor-tant	Very im-portant
Intrinsic orienta-tion	My entire approach to life is based on my religion		6 (2.87%)	6 (2.87%)	30 (14.35%)	23 (11.00%)	144 (68.90%)
	I strive to live my life according to my religious beliefs		4 (1.91%)	8 (3.83%)	26 (12.44%)	53 (25.36%)	118 (56.46%)
	I have often had a strong sense of God's presence		2 (0.96%)	3 (1.44%)	27 (12.92%)	44 (21.05%)	133 (63.64%)
	My religion is im-portant because it gives me answers to many questions about the meaning of life		3 (1.44%)	0	14	35 (16.75%)	157 (75.12%)
	I enjoy reading about my religion		1 (0.48%)	4 (1.91%)	18 (8.61%)	42 (20.10%)	144 (68.90%)
	It is important for me to spend time thinking and pray-ing in private		5 (2.39%)	4 (1.91%)	14	39 (18.66%)	147 (70.33%)
Extrinsic social orienta-tion	I go to church mainly to spend time with my friends		103 (49.28%)	54 (25.84%)	17 (8.13%)	14 (6.70%)	21 (10.05%)
	I go to church mainly because I enjoy seeing the people I know there		78 (37.32%)	55 (26.32%)	26 (12.44%)	14 (6.70%)	36 (17.22%)
	I go to church be-cause it helps me make friends	1 (0.48%)	66 (31.58%)	42 (20.10%)	25 (11.96%)	24 (11.48%)	51 (24.40%)
Personal extrinsic orienta-tion	I pray mainly to get relief and protec-tion		5 (2.39%)	5 (2.39%)	16 (7.66%)	31 (14.83%)	152 (72.73%)
	What religion of-fers me most is re-lief in times of trouble and sadness		4 (1.91%)	8 (3.83%)	13	37 (17.70%)	147 (70.33%)
	Praying is for ob-taining peace and happiness		2 (0.96%)	3 (1.44%)	3 (1.44%)	27 (12.92%)	174 (83.25%)

The results on intrinsic orientation indicate that most participants affirm that their lives are guided by faith and that they strive to live according to their beliefs, with more than 80% rating these statements as important or very important. Similarly, 75.12% of participants stated that religion is very important in giving meaning to life, and 63.64% perceive the experience of God's presence as very important. In addition, personal activities such as read-ing religious texts and private prayer appear to be valued, with more than 70% of responses in the "very important" category. These results suggest a strong intrinsic orientation, in which religion is seen as a source of meaning that helps guide life.

Considering the results for Social Extrinsic Orientation, the social motives associated with religious practice are perceived as having low importance. Most respondents indicate that attending church primarily to socialize or make friends is not relevant, as only a minority (17% to 24%) consider these social motivations to be important

or very important. Thus, the social dimension plays a secondary role in the participants' religious experiences in this study, compared with more personal or spiritual motivations.

Regarding Personal Extrinsic Orientation, there is also a positive trend. Praying for relief, protection, peace, or happiness was rated as very important by more than 70% of participants in all items. Religion is also recognized as a source of support in difficult times, with 70.33% considering it very important. These findings suggest that although social motives carry limited weight, personal extrinsic orientation is integrated into religious experience, serving as a source of comfort and emotional well-being.

Finally, in terms of internal consistency, as assessed by Cronbach's alpha, Intrinsic Orientation ($\alpha = 0.81$), Social Extrinsic Orientation ($\alpha = 0.75$), and Personal Extrinsic Orientation ($\alpha = 0.73$) show adequate reliability, indicating good consistency among the items that make up each subscale. Overall, the instrument shows solid consistency ($\alpha = 0.81$), supporting its relevance for measuring these orientations in the sample analyzed.

Correlation analysis

To complement the descriptive analysis of each dimension, a study of correlations between the ASPIRES subscales and religious orientations was conducted. The objective of this analysis is to explore how experiences of spirituality, religiosity, and crisis relate to different ways of living the faith, whether intrinsically, extrinsically social, or extrinsically personal. In this case, since these are latent variables, Spearman's rank correlation coefficient is appropriate (Sheskin, 2020). The result is presented in Figure 7.

Figure 7 *Correlations between variables*
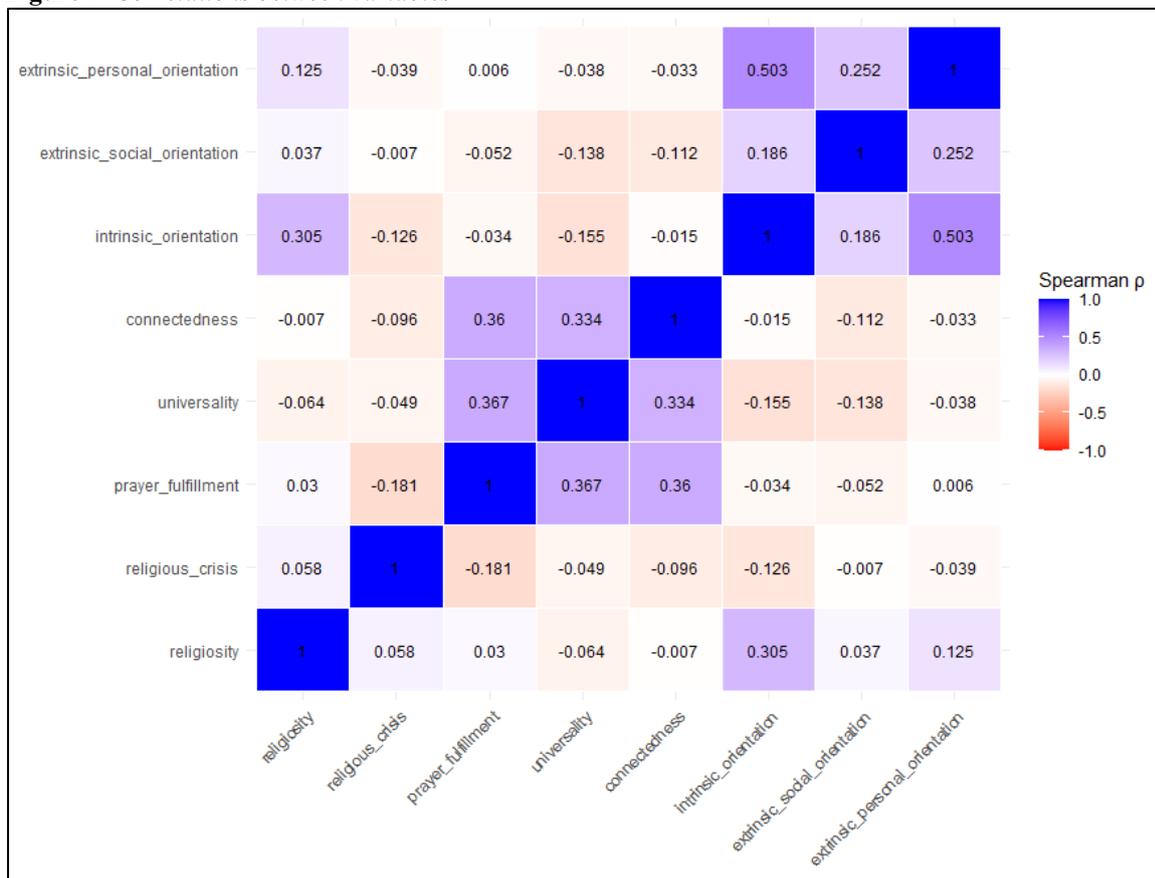
The correlation analysis shows that religiosity is primarily associated with intrinsic orientation (p-value=0.000), indicating that those who place greater importance on religion in their lives tend to experience it as an internal guide rather than a social practice. Prayer is positively linked to both universality (p-value = 0.000) and connectivity (p-value = 0.000), showing that prayer is associated with a vision of interconnection and the maintenance of transcendent bonds. Likewise, intrinsic orientation correlates moderately with personal extrinsic orientation (p-value = 0.000), suggesting that experiencing faith as an internal commitment is accompanied by seeking comfort and protection through prayer. In contrast, social extrinsic orientation shows weak correlations with the other dimensions, confirming that social motives occupy a secondary place within the spirituality and religiosity of the sample.

4. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this study was to analyze spirituality and religiosity in incarcerated individuals through spiritual assistance in two prisons in Bucaramanga. The results obtained from applying the ASPIRES and Age

Universal I-E-12 scales suggest that participants' spirituality and religiosity are deeply rooted in an intrinsic orientation, in which faith serves as a personal guide rather than a mere social practice. In addition, the data reveal a positive and significant correlation between prayer practice and perceptions of interconnection and transcendence. These findings are consistent with those of Simkin & Etchevers (2014) and highlight the importance of investigating the relationship between inmates' spirituality and personality to identify traits linked to their religious and spiritual experiences (Lemos & Oñate, 2018).

Regarding the assessment of spirituality in incarcerated individuals as an integrative element of personal and collective growth, the results showed that most participants reported finding inner strength, peace, and personal growth through prayer or meditation, which is a predictor of psychological well-being (Quintero, 2020). The high degree of agreement with statements about finding fulfillment and peace in prayer supports the idea that spirituality functions as an integrating factor in their personal development. This "religious attitude" of believers strengthens a lifestyle and fosters social relationships (De Diego Cordero & Rodríguez, 2018).

In addition, it was found that when spiritual support groups are involved, a large majority of inmates (90.4%) participate in prison programs, including those of a spiritual nature. This high level of involvement suggests that religious interventions are significant in the prison community. These findings are consistent with Khan (2025), who found that prisoners who followed a model of religiosity showed changes in moral thinking. This high level of involvement suggests that religious and spiritual interventions are significant within the prison community. While social motivations for attending religious services were considered secondary for most participants, the interventions fostered a community environment in which individuals could participate in these activities.

The results reveal a strong intrinsic orientation, with individuals affirming that their lives are guided by faith and that religion gives them meaning. They also reported that their religious commitments have increased and that they feel a strong personal relationship with God. As Beltrán Cely (2013) notes, a personal encounter with God, the relevance of prayer, Bible reading, and other elements incorporated into worship produce a certain spiritual ecstasy and fulfillment. These findings imply that the spiritual assistance provided was timely in fostering a personal and intentional relationship with their faith, rather than mere superficial or social participation.

Regarding the instrument's scale validation among prisoners, adequate Cronbach's alpha values were obtained for Religious Orientation (Intrinsic, Extrinsic Social, and Extrinsic Personal), indicating good internal consistency. The ASPIRES scale also showed acceptable internal consistency for the dimensions of Spiritual Transcendence and Religious Feelings. These results validate the relevance of these instruments for this specific population. Based on a body of psychometric validation and adaptation studies, the ASPIRES scale systematically examines the relationships between religiosity and/or spirituality and psychological variables such as mental health, personality, and positive psychology (Morales et al., 2023).

The results of the demographic data analysis provide a context for interpreting the findings. The sample was concentrated among young and middle-aged adults, predominantly single or cohabiting. This suggests that spiritual interventions are particularly relevant for a younger sector of the prison population. The high percentage of participants with a high school education (complete or incomplete) indicates a group that, while having some formal education, may benefit from the alternative spiritual programs offered. The high rate of participation in prison activities and religious diversity, with Adventist affiliation predominating (58.9%), indicate that the sample was receptive to organized programs.

Analysis of the ASPIRES section - Religious Feelings revealed a contrast in the practice of prayer and attendance at religious services. Although personal prayer practice was low, attendance at community religious services was very high, suggesting a disconnect between individual spiritual discipline and community participation, which could be due to the structured nature of prison life, where group activities are more accessible than private prayer. Despite this, most inmates reported a strong or very strong personal relationship with God and that their religious commitment had increased since their incarceration. These results are consistent with those of Braam & Koenig (2019), who found similar findings. Thus, these authors propose a reverse tautological assessment to understand these associations; however, the emotional and personal connection to their faith is very real. Furthermore, low scores on the "religious crisis" items indicate that participants do not feel abandoned, punished, or distanced from God.

The results of the ASPIRES - Spiritual Transcendence section further support the idea of a strong and meaningful spiritual life. Most participants reported finding inner peace, personal growth, and emotional support through prayer and meditation. The high level of agreement with statements about a sense of universal interconnectedness and a higher cosmic order suggests that their spirituality extends beyond personal beliefs to encompass a broader and more transcendent worldview. This finding is particularly interesting, as it indicates that their spiritual practices are not only for personal relief, but also for achieving a greater sense of purpose and connection to the world. In this sense, Flores Escobar (2017) conceives of spirituality as a personal, unique, free experience, whose ultimate goal is spiritual transcendence, and religiosity as a set of acts performed by a person belonging to an organization or institution, under the protection of belief in a God or gods or a higher being. He concludes that both spirituality and religiosity enable more comprehensive development and an attitude of peace and tranquility toward life, and, consequently, a higher level of happiness.

The results of the Religious Orientations scale (Age Universal I-E-12) indicate a predominance of intrinsic religious orientation. The vast majority of participants stated that their lives are guided by their faith and that religion provides answers to questions about the meaning of life and the "spirituality that allows them to know themselves

and feel satisfied" (Gallardo-Peralta & Sánchez-Moreno, 2020). This contrasts with the little importance given to social motivations for religious practice, such as socializing or making friends. However, there was also a strong positive correlation with personal extrinsic orientation, meaning that participants use their faith to obtain comfort, relief, peace, and protection. This indicates that their spirituality is an integral combination of deep personal commitment and the practical need for support in a difficult environment. Studies of the prison population in Colombia are scarce in terms of religious-spiritual and psychological variables. Other results provided encourage the incorporation of new instruments to better measure the religious phenomenon (Saldías-Ortega & Moyano-Díaz, 2023).

Threats to the Validity of the Results

Threats to the validity of the results were identified from the point of view of internal, external, construct, and conclusion validity (Šmite et al., 2017). With regard to internal validity, this research is based on the quantitative correlational design used, which allows the relationship between the study variables, namely spirituality, religiosity, and spiritual interventions, to be established. In this case, the possibility of bias was reduced by using convenience sampling, selecting participants who voluntarily wished to take part in religious activities, which guarantees intrinsic motivation for the study and reduces the risk of forced responses. Additionally, Spearman's correlation coefficient was used for statistical analysis, which is appropriate for this type of latent variable and does not require assuming a normal distribution, thus increasing the reliability of the results.

External validity, or the ability to generalize the findings to other populations, is limited in this study due to the sampling method. The sample was selected for convenience and consisted of 209 inmates from two prisons in Bucaramanga. This selection was based on participants' willingness to participate in religious activities and on authorization from the institutions' administrators, which does not allow the sample to be representative of the Colombian prison population as a whole. Therefore, the results are specific to this context and this sample.

On the other hand, the construct validity of the study was reinforced by the use of instruments with previously demonstrated psychometric properties adapted to the Ibero-American context. The ASPIRES Assessment Scale and the Age Universal I-E-12 Scale were used, both of which were validated in previous research. Additionally, internal consistency was assessed in the study sample using Cronbach's alpha, yielding acceptable values that support the instrument's robustness for general application to this population.

Finally, the use of validated instruments supports the validity of the conclusion, as they have demonstrated good psychometric properties in the Ibero-American context. The internal consistency of the instruments, as measured by Cronbach's alpha, indicates that the measurements were reliable. However, the main weakness is that the research design is correlational, which prevents establishing causal relationships; therefore, it is not possible to assert that spiritual intervention was the direct cause of the observed changes. In addition, convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings to other prison populations, as the sample consisted of volunteers who were already predisposed to participate in religious activities.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

This article presents an analysis of spirituality and religiosity in incarcerated individuals through spiritual and religious assistance in two prisons in Bucaramanga. After spiritual and religious interventions, participants' faith is significantly related to an intrinsic orientation, perceived as an internal guide in their lives rather than as a mere social practice.

The analysis of demographic data provides an important context for the findings. The sample, composed mainly of young and middle-aged adults, single or in domestic partnerships, showed a high level of participation in prison activities. Religious diversity, with a notable predominance of Adventist affiliation, is a key factor influencing the participants' spiritual experiences.

In terms of religious practices, a marked contrast was observed in the sample. Although the frequency of personal prayer was low, attendance at community religious services was very high. This pattern suggests that participation in the community carries considerable weight in participants' spiritual experience, even when their individual practice is limited. Despite this apparent disconnect, most respondents reported having a "strong" or "very strong" personal relationship with God. In addition, more than 60% of participants reported that their religious interests and commitments have increased since being deprived of their liberty.

As part of future research projections, we propose developing a new version of the instrument that includes a section on mental health, enabling a more holistic analysis of the relationship among spirituality, religiosity, and psychological well-being in this population. In addition, we suggest the creation of a spiritual accompaniment manual based on the Master Plan for Prison Spiritual Development to standardize and improve interventions. Finally, it is recommended to analyze how a spiritual-religious strategy influences religious crises among incarcerated individuals, which would help better understand the role of faith in times of extreme difficulty.

6. REFERENCES

1. Beltrán Cely, W. M. (2013). Religious pluralization and social change in Colombia. Theologica Xaveriana, 63(175).

2. Braam, A. W., & Koenig, H. G. (2019). Religion, spirituality, and depression in prospective studies: A systematic review. In Journal of Affective Disorders (Vol. 257, pp. 428–438). Elsevier B.V. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.06.063

3. Bravin, A. M., Trettene, A. D. S., de Andrade, L. G. M., & Popim, R. C. (2019). Benefits of spirituality and/or religiosity in patients with Chronic Kidney Disease: an integrative review. In Revista Brasileira de Enfermagem (Vol. 72, Issue 2). https://doi.org/10.1590/0034-7167-2018-0051

4. Ceballos, M. (2000). Manual of the Adventist Institute of Chaplaincy (J. Pascuas Dusan, Trans.). https://www.adventistchaplains.org/

5. Cronbach, L. J. (1951). Coefficient alpha and the internal structure of tests. Psychometrika, 16(3), 297–334. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02310555

6. Cuadros Cagua, I., Ibarra Betancur, G., Güicón Barrera, H., & Rodríguez Parra, A. (2023). Master Plan for Spiritual Development in Prisons. Https://Ingenieria.Unac.Edu.Co/Plan%20Maestro%20de%20Desarrollo%20Espiritual%20y%20Religioso%20Carcelario.Pdf.

7. De Diego Cordero, R., & Rodríguez, M. G. (2018). The influence of religiosity on health: The case of healthy/unhealthy habits. Culture of Care, 22(52). https://doi.org/10.14198/cuid.2018.52.15

8. Flores Escobar, F. (2017). Spirituality in education, separated from religiosity. Revista Científica de La UCSA, 4(1). https://doi.org/10.18004/ucsa/2409-8752/2017.004(01)057-066

9. Frias-Navarro, D. (2006). Cronbach's alpha and internal consistency of items in a measurement instrument. University of Valencia, 2003, 1–3. http://www.es/friasnav/

10. Hernández-Sampieri, R., Fernández, C., & Baptista, P. (2016). Research methodology. 6th Edition Sampieri. Guide to Conducting Social Research. Plaza y Valdés.

11. IASD. (2021). Master Plan for Spiritual Development.

12. Khan, S. (2025). Religion Behind Bars: Faith-based Programs in the Rehabilitation of Offenders in the Medium B Westville Correctional Center, Durban. Journal for the Study of Religion, 37(2), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.17159/2413-3027/2024/v37n2a1

13. Krmpotic, C. S. (2016). Spirituality as a Dimension of Quality of Life. Conceptual Explorations of an Ongoing Investigation. Scripta Ethnologica, XXXVIII.

14. Lemos, V., & Oñate, M. E. (2018). Spirituality and personality within the framework of The Big Five. Psychological Sciences, 12(1).

15. Morales, J., Vera, A., Colombano, M., Ferrero, P. F., & Travis, D. (2023). The Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments scale: a bibliometric analysis. 62. http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/LosautoresconservansusderechosARK:http://id.caicyt.gov.ar/ark:/s18537081/plty07wii

16. Piedmont, R. L. (2012). Overview and Development of a Trait-Based Measure of Numinous Constructs: The Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) Scale. The Oxford Handbook of Psychology and Spirituality, 104–122. https://doi.org/10.1093/OXFORDHB/9780199729920.013.0007

17. Piotrowski, J. P., Żemojtel-Piotrowska, M., Piedmont, R. L., & Baran, T. (2021). The Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments (ASPIRES) scale: Examining a spiritual transcendence nomological net in Polish context. Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, 13(1), 36–45. https://doi.org/10.1037/REL0000273

18. Quintero, H. (2020). Religiosity, spirituality, and mental health. In Religiosity, spirituality, and mental health. https://doi.org/10.35997/libroreligiosidadespiritualidad

19. Saldías-Ortega, F., & Moyano-Díaz, E. (2023). Influence of Spirituality and Religiosity on Happiness in Older Adults. Psykhe, 32(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.7764/psykhe.2021.29435

20. Sheskin, D. J. (2020). Handbook of Parametric and Nonparametric Statistical Procedures (5th Edition). Chapman & Hall/CRC. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1201/9780429186196

21. Simkin, H. (2017). Assessment of Spirituality and Religious Sentiments scale (ASPIRES): Spiritual Transcendence within the five-factor model. Universitas Psychologica, 16(2). https://doi.org/10.11144/Javeriana.upsy16-2.aeee

22. Simkin, H., & Etchevers, M. (2014). Religiosity, spirituality, and mental health within the framework of the Five-Factor Model of Personality. Acta Psiquiátrica y Psicológica de América Latina, 60(4).

23. Simkin, H., & Etchezahar, E. (2013). The Extrinsic and Intrinsic Religious Orientations: Validation of the "Age Universal" I-E Scale in the Argentinian Context. Psykhe, 22(1), 97–106. https://doi.org/10.7764/psykhe.22.1.477

24. Šmite, D., Moe, N. B., Šāblis, A., & Wohlin, C. (2017). Software teams and their knowledge networks in large-scale software development. Information and Software Technology, 86, 71–86. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.infsof.2017.01.003

25. Wohlin, C., Runeson, P., Höst, M., Ohlsson, M. C., Regnell, B., & Wesslén, A. (2012). Experimentation in Software Engineering. In Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling (Vol. 53, Issue 9). Springer, Berlin, Heidelberg. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-29044-2