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University Students' Experiences of Nature, Spirituality and Psychological Well-being: A Qualitative Inquiry

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Abstract

There has been growing interest in understanding the factors that contribute to the psychological well-being of university students. University life can be stressful and overwhelming, making it increasingly critical to explore non-clinical, humanistic pathways that can support emotional resilience, mental clarity, and personal growth. Among such pathways, nature connectedness and spirituality have emerged as meaningful constructs in promoting mental health and overall well-being. This qualitative study aims to explore the interconnections between nature connectedness, spirituality, and the psychological well-being of undergraduate students. Ten undergraduate students, selected through purposive sampling, participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews designed to elicit rich, personal insights into their lived experiences. Thematic analysis was employed to analyse the data, identifying recurring themes and the meaning-making processes

underlying participant narratives. Four key themes were identified: (1) routine engagement with nature, (2) nature as a coping strategy, (3) spiritual experiences in nature, and (4) spirituality shaping nature connectedness and relationships. The findings illustrate how students' intentional interactions with natural environments serve as a vital resource for stress relief, emotional restoration, and cognitive reprieve. Concurrently, spirituality was found to offer a valuable source of inner strength, hope, meaning, and coping strategies, especially during periods of adversity, with natural settings often facilitating these spiritual experiences. This study contributes to the broader discourse on holistic and humanistic approaches in higher education by highlighting the psychological and emotional benefits of integrating ecological and spiritual dimensions. It suggests practical implications for educators, counselors, and policymakers in designing supportive learning environments and well-being initiatives that nurture the whole student. © 2026, Qualitative Research Association of Malaysia (QRAM). All rights reserved.

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