

Title:

Spirituality and Mental Health

Author:

Maria do Carmo Lemos Vieira Gouveia¹

Content:

Spirituality is a unifying force of the person and the essence of being that permeates all life. It is the inter-connection with self, others, nature, God, life, force, absolute and transcendent (Vaillot,1970; Goddard,1995; Narayanasamy 1999; Dossey, 2005).

The complex world of values, the question about the ultimate meaning of things, the basic choices of life, the meaning and reason for existence, are key elements of the spiritual dimension (Narayanasamy, 1999, Brusco, 2002; Riley, 2004).

Although it is not possible to determine precisely the mechanisms of spirituality interaction in mental health, several studies have demonstrated its influence on physical, mental and social health.

In a review that relates health to spirituality, Thoresen (1999) found that higher levels of spirituality are related to: higher levels of overall well-being and life satisfaction, lower levels of depressive symptoms and suicide, higher levels of marital satisfaction and less substance abuse.

Studies have shown that in elderly patients with cancerous disease, the spiritual well-being was a protection factor related to positive attitudes to combat the disease, decrease anxiety and the demands imposed by the disease. Also in college students, the spiritual well-being was associated with decreased risk of depression and suicide, as well in a population group of people between 16 and 78 years, the protective nature of spiritual well-being was demonstrated by its association with the reduction of mental disorders.

These and other studies suggest that the practice of spiritual activities can influence psychodynamically, through positive emotions like hope, forgiveness, self-esteem and love. These emotions may be important for mental health in terms of possible psychoneuroimmunological and psychophysiological mechanisms. The experience of having felt the satisfaction in life from Spiritual well-being, allows the individual to an internal resource for understanding and control of critical existential situations, such as pain, suffering and death.

The Spirituality is a very wide issue and its measurement quite complex. Spiritual well-being is one of the subjects that can be assessed in Spirituality.

¹ Master Degree, Mental Health and Psychiatric Nurse, Nursing Professor, Nursing PhD Student, University of Madeira- Centro de Competência de Tecnologias da saúde, Portugal, carmo.gouveia@gmail.com.

Paloutzian and Ellison (1982) developed a rating scale of spiritual well-being (SWBS), based on the concept of spirituality that involves a vertical component, religious (a sense of well-being in relation to God), and a horizontal component, existential (a sense of purpose and life satisfaction which does not require any specifically religious reference).

By applying this instrument, Volcan et al (2003) concluded that spiritual well-being constitutes a protective factor for minor psychiatric disorders and high scores of spiritual well-being and especially existential well-being increase the likelihood to have better mental health.

Individuals with low and moderate score of spiritual well-being showed a two times higher frequency of minor psychiatric disorders, compared to those with high scores and subjects with low and moderate scores of spiritual well-being, were nearly five times more positive SRQ (screening instrument for mental disorders) than those with high scores.

Thus, the evidence suggests that the strengthening of spiritual well-being can help significantly in promoting mental health, as well as in reducing distress related to disease. Spirituality is an individual psychosocial resource (and possibly community) to promote mental health. It is recommended for nurses, encouraging their clients the practice of spiritual activities, by their apparent relationship with better health, quality of life, longer life expectancy and lower anxiety, depression and suicide.

REFERENCES:

Paloutzian R, Ellison C. Loneliness, spiritual well-being and the quality of life. In: Peplau D, Perlman D, editors. *Loneliness: A sourcebook of current theory, research and therapy*. New York: John Wiley and Sons; 1982. p. 224-35.

Ribeiro, José Luís (2007), Escola Superior de Enfermagem do Porto Faculdade de Psicologia e Ciências da Educação da Universidade do Porto, *Arquivos de Medicina*, 21(2):47-53

Rego, Ana Cristina L. M.C. (2007), *A atenção ao espiritual - Tradução e Validação Linguística e Cultural da Spiritual Assessment Scale, Um Instrumento de Avaliação Espiritual*, Tese apresentada ao Instituto de Ciências da Universidade Católica Portuguesa para obtenção do grau de Mestre em Enfermagem.

Ribeiro, J. Pais; Pombeiro, T. (s/d), *Relação entre espiritualidade, ânimo e qualidade de vida em pessoas idosa*, Faculdade de Psicologia e de Ciências da Educação U.Porto.

Volcan, Sandra M. S. et al (2003), *Relação entre bem-estar espiritual e transtornos psiquiátricos menores: estudo transversal*, *Rev. Saúde Pública*, vol.37 no.4, São Paulo, Aug