

Spirituality, suffering and pain

Espiritualidade, sofrimento e dor

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Spirituality and health is a topic in the frontier of scientific research and studies with increasing relevance and volume have been published¹⁻⁹. In this current issue, Moreira, Santana and Posso¹⁰ analyze in a literature review the clinical studies that evaluated the spirituality-based interventions for pain reduction used in nursing. Congratulations to the Brazilian Journal of Pain for accepting an article in this area and especially for highlighting it in an editorial.


In the article, the authors navigate through the difficult issue of defining spirituality and religiosity, a matter still under debate in the scientific field, and one that needs further understanding. After selection based on the established criteria, 10 articles were included in this review. Numerous clinical situations such as childbirth, burns, chronic renal failure, vascular diseases, and cancer were studied. Several interventions were performed, but despite the heterogeneity, all treatments focused on spiritual care through specific programs or prayer therapy. All resulted in positive outcomes in reduction of pain and related anxiety, as well as improving vital parameters. This review has a relevant role in guiding future practices, as it gathers evidence that supports spirituality as a tool to reduce pain-related suffering, and it's a starting point for a scientific approach towards the topic, so that further research can be conducted, addressing more clinical scenarios, more interventions and comparisons with treatments already established in the guidelines.

Are pain and suffering inseparable? To dissociate pain from suffering is as difficult as to give context to both. Viktor Frankl highlights the importance to give meaning to suffering, and religiosity and spirituality can provide that. The same author points out that suffering is not at all necessary to find meaning¹¹. Meaning simply exists, it only needs to be found. Thus, we should look at the opportunity of positive religious coping and its targeted interventions presented but should not miss the other end: negative religious coping, which tends not to appear in studies and may generate worse outcomes.

Let more studies be conducted in this very challenging area that is spirituality and health, through rigorous practices and hypotheses evidenced in previous studies and reviews such as the one discussed here, establishing previous works as guidelines for future research.

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