



SPIRITUAL RELIGIOUS STRUGGLES AND SUICIDE: THE ROLE OF SELF-FORGIVENESS IN MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT

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BACKGROUND

Spiritual/religious coping strategies may be used to handle stressor events caused by poor health. At the same time, it may trigger conflicts. Spiritual/Religious struggles experienced during health treatment are predictive factors for depression, worst adherence to treatment and higher mortality rates.

Aims:

- Point out the relationship between spiritual religious struggles, psychiatric disorders and suicide.
- Discuss self-forgiveness as a practice of caring for oneself, as an expression of self-compassion and as a possible intervention strategy in the care of the suffering person.

METHODS

Case study, selected by intentional sampling of an inpatient in a psychiatric clinic in Curitiba (Brasil)

Both **quantitative¹** and **qualitative²**

¹ **Brief RCOPE Scale, Spiritual Religious Struggles Scale (SRSS)** and **Centrality of Religiosity Scale** (Huber & Huber, 2012). Data collected were analyzed with SPSS v.21

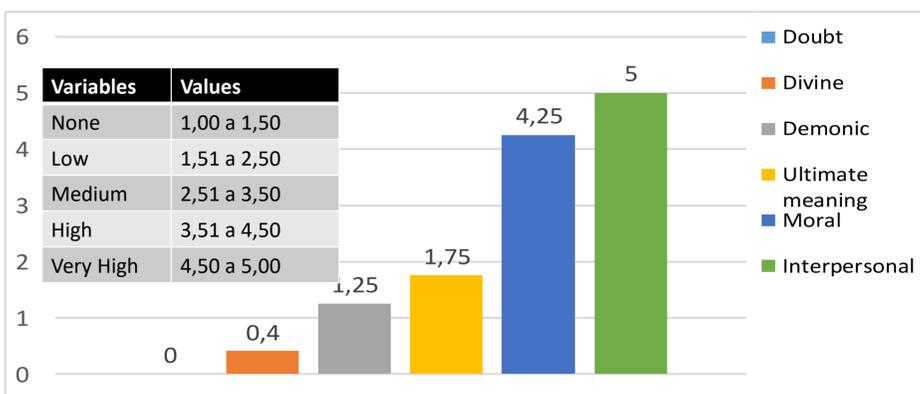
² **Phenomenological Interview**

Data analysis was holistic, through the description of the case.

RESULTS

Evangelical **pastor**, 36 years old, married, 3 kids. He considers himself as **spiritual and religious person**. He is **supported by his family** during health treatment. Several times a week he attends **biblical studies**, religious service and **prayers many times a day**. Feels **discriminated and treated unfairly** by the **community of faith**. Diagnosed with **depression** and **alcohol abuse**. Unsuccessful **suicide attempt**

- Highly religious (M=4,8)** on all dimensions assessed.
- High use of positive coping strategies (M=5)** and **low use of negative coping strategies (M=1,67)**.



SRRS dimensions according to the average scores

Interpersonal Struggles: *“During the time I stayed there, which was four years, the argues were too infantilized, people used to fight for anything (...) that made me exhausted, because I was the only pastor in that church (...) and finally came an insupportable situation (...) So, I wrote a letter saying that by 2018 I would no longer be their leader”.* (Excerpt from the interview)

•*“Felt hurted, mistreated, or offended by religious/spiritual people”* (SRSS)

•*“Felt rejected or misunderstood by r/s people”* (SRSS)

•*“Felt angry at organized religion”* (SRSS)

Moral Struggles: *“I guess that I feel like a person that is not happy in its own job environment, that is not happy in a public career, that is not happy doing what consider to be right, even though I see so many people doing wrong things”.* (Excerpt from the interview).

•*“Felt guilty for not living up to my moral standards”* (SRSS);

•*“Wrestled with attempts to follow my moral principles”* (SRSS)

The positive r/s coping strategy most used (“Focused on religion to stop worrying about my problems”) was not enough to overcome the negative r/s coping strategy (“Wondered whether my church had abandoned me”). The interpersonal and moral s/r struggles indicates the difficulty on the practice of the self-forgiveness, on forgiving others, despair and depression – which leads to the suicide attempt.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study raises the hypothesis that depression can be mediated by either positive spiritual religious coping or spiritual struggles, in conjunction with the centrality of religion in the individual's life. In some cases, it may predict worse outcomes, such as suicide attempt.

- Need to develop further studies with bigger sample about s/r struggles with psychiatric patients to verify the hypotheses raised in this study. Despite of that, those studies may indicate aspects that need to be taken in consideration on offering s/r care for this population.

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