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*Corresponding author

Sefa Bulut, Department of Psychological
Counseling and Guidance, Ibn Haldun
University, İstanbul, Turkey

ORCID ID:

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2622-4390>

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Review Article

The Positive Correlation between Well-Being and Religious Practices & Spirituality in the Period of Late Adulthood

Esra Nur Kahrıman and Sefa Bulut*

Department of Counseling Psychology, Ibn Haldun University, Turkey

Abstract

In this research article, the positive relationship between the level of religiosity, life satisfaction, and mental well-being in the old age period are conveyed. Initially, the aging process is touched upon and the physical and mental problems that people face in the old age process are demonstrated. A few of these problems are the restriction in physical activities, the isolation brought by city life, the narrowing of the family unit, and retirement psychology. Moreover, the concepts of spirituality and religion are mentioned and their positive effects on human life are highlighted. These effects may be the belief that the god will be with the person, will help, death is a meeting with the god, religion, and prayer play an important role in correcting the mistakes made in the past. All these beliefs keep the person away from worldly concerns and bring along with well-being in the old age process. At the end of the research article, the positive correlation of religion and spirituality on people's mental health and well-being in the old age process and its reasons are explained. Examples from various studies conducted in the East and West were given and the positive correlation between religion and spiritual well-being was supported by these examples.

Introduction

The rapid increase in the world population and the confrontation of the world with demographic revolution bring about an increase in life expectancy. According to the World Health Organization, the fastest growing age groups are 60 years and older; therefore, as longevity increases, fertility decreases, leading to widespread research on increased longevity in both physical and mental health [1]. The old age period differs from society to society and this is due to the different lifestyles of each society, the weather conditions depending on the geographical region they live in, or the socio-economic status of the geographical region. All these are a few elements that make up the welfare level of the society, so the point that determines the aging period of the society depends on the welfare level. Social or individual elements play a crucial and huge role in the old age stage. On the other hand, it can be divided human development into four parts. These four categories are social, physical, emotional, and mental areas and these areas have specific places in developmental psychology [2]. The aging process is a duration that can limit individuals socially and physically, reducing the functionality of individuals to do any activity. In this process, chronic diseases or other physical health problems cause the elderly to lag behind in social activities. A few of these health problems are dementia, Alzheimer's, vision disorders, hearing disorders, malnutrition, gait disturbances and frequent falls, sleep disorders, and osteoarthritis [3]. On the other hand, various developments in the fields of health and technology have facilitated the aging process and provided progress in the direction of the increase in the elderly population. These developments also caused migration from rural to urban areas. Societies that started to live in urban areas preferred a family that includes a small number of members rather than establishing a large family, so intergenerational communication has weakened. All these situations can cause elderly people to feel inadequate and useless [4].

Another reason that complicates the aging process is the difficulties that are experienced by the elderly regarding social adaptation. Social cohesion depends on factors such as occupation, education, and neighborhood. One of the points where social adaptation undergoes a great change in the old age process is that the person quits his/her job and retires during his/her life; hence, the elderly leave their familiar working environments during the retirement process, and this brings along with a sense of loneliness and some depressive feelings in them [3]. At the same time, retirement reinforces the feeling of old age and can cause people to feel physically and mentally tired and exhausted. The problems I highlighted above can reduce the quality of life of the elderly and adversely affect their well-being in old age. Not all elderly people have the same level of well-being and life satisfaction. As I touched upon above, there are some critical factors that affect well-being, such as physical health, mental health, opportunity to establish social relationships, environmental status, and socio-demographic [3]. While all these problems affect the elderly psychologically, their relations with spirituality and religion in the old age process can positively affect life satisfaction and well-being.

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality is a very real concept for people, but since it is an intangible concept, it is difficult to reach the absolute meaning of spirituality. Spirituality, a word born from the Latin word 'sipiritus', means spiritism in Western countries, but according to TDK (Turkish Language Institution), it means intangible, intuitable, abstract, and spiritual [5]. Spirituality is a concept that has existed since the beginning of humanity and helps people to make sense of their existence. People always question their existence in the world and tend to seek answers to this, therefore questioning existence brings spirituality, in addition, the concept of spirituality may be based on religion or not related to religion [6]. In this research, since the relationship between religion and well-being is examined, the religion-based part of spirituality will be discussed. When health is mentioned, it is seen that the concept of spirituality is also a part of health because health is a state of both physical and spiritual well-being, accordingly, people need a power that provides a sense of trust, which we call spirituality, in order to accept or realize the changes and situations in their lives [5]. The sense of spirituality is an individually constructed social phenomenon, and an individual who has a sense of spirituality has inner happiness, so s/he feels peaceful in her/his daily life.

In this context, if we mention religion, religion is a symbolic formation that provides a sense of different identity to its members, reducing people's anxieties about existence, together with the effects and consequences of the relationship with a divine being, directly or indirectly [7]. According to William James, old age is the 'perfect religious age'. The aging individual turns to religion in order to overcome the fear and anxiety of death and to overcome the feeling of loneliness, and old people have a lot of time to think about religion or contemplate, and they tend to spend this time contemplating religion [7]. In addition to all these, the fact that older people devote their time to worship in their old age rather than their youth years and that they are consistent in worship confirms William James's claims. One of the most substantial features in the psychology of old age is the increase in religious orientation and the reasons for this are to overcome the guilt caused by the feeling of guilt in the past, closeness to death, and fear of death. As a result of all these, we can deduce that religion is a way of life, therefore we can conclude that it is a natural process for religion to affect the quality of life. A sense of meaning that the person will give herself/himself and focus on creates a feeling of pleasure and life satisfaction in the person, as it fills the blanks inside the person and makes life meaningful. Leading names of psychology such as Maslow, Allport, and Fromm argued that religion heals people, completes the deficiencies of the person, and makes them mentally healthy [8].

Relationship between Well-being and Religion & Spirituality

As I touched upon under the heading of introduction, there are factors that negatively affect the physical health of the person during old age, such as retirement, feeling lonely, sadness over the loss of physical health, fear of death, as well as factors that negatively affect mental health. At this point, religion is a phenomenon that the elderly (not only the elderly but also people of all ages) take refuge and can improve their mental health; therefore, religion helps to overcome the problems I highlighted above and supports the elderly emotionally and spiritually. Accordingly, the person creates a strategy to overcome the physical and mental difficulties s/he experiences by communicating with the being that is sacred to her/him, asking for help, and praying, hence, s/he develops emotional and mental endurance [6]. In one of his studies, MacKinlay listed the themes related to spiritual duties in old age as follows:

- a. Ultimate life meaning,
- b. Understanding answers,
- c. Vulnerability to self-sufficiency,
- d. The meaning of the next life and wisdom,
- e. Isolation against intercourse,
- f. Fear versus hope

When the life process of people is considered and the mental-physical health, life satisfaction, and inner peace of the elderly are examined, it is concluded that devotion to religion and the phenomenon of spirituality play a major role [9].

In a study, it was observed that organizational religiosity (participating in religious services, participating in prayer groups) decreased the level of depression and its effects on older adult men, in addition, increased self-esteem and optimism were observed in men [10]. In the same study, non-organizational religiosity reduced the level of death anxiety in older adult women, in addition, religious activities play a major role in mental health, life satisfaction, and well-being of men rather than adult older women [10]. In another study conducted by Ellison and Levin, it can be deduced that religious and spiritual influences positively affect well-being. Five models which are prevention, stressor response, stressor effects, moderator, offsetting or counterbalancing effects explaining that spirituality and religion affect physical and mental health were put forward by Ellison and Levin (1998). While the prevention specified in these 5 models is related to the way a person's lifestyle and behaviors are affected, the stressor response is the mediator model that provides positive change and parallel increase between stressors, spirituality, and religion [11]. On the other hand, while stressor effects are associated with situations where stressors inhibit spirituality and religiosity, the moderator model indicates that spirituality and religion reduce the damaging effects of stressors. Finally, offsetting or counterbalancing effects is the model that relates to the independent effects of spirituality and religion on health [11]. Beyond all, in a study by Koenig, Kvale, and Ferrel, it was found that there was a moderately strong relationship between religious measures such as organizational religious activity, non-organizational religious activity, and intrinsic religiosity and spirituality. Beyond all these, when examining the relationship between mental health and religion, the concepts and relationships of life satisfaction, well-being,

existence, or the meaning and purpose of life are investigated rather than psychiatric scales [12]. Moreover, in a study by a researcher named Hunsberger, a positive correlation was observed between religious variables and life satisfaction (happiness-compliance), and this study was conducted with older adults aged 65-88 years [12]. In many studies, such as the studies mentioned above, religion and religious activities and well-being, life satisfaction, and mental health have been found to be positively correlated in people of all ages, not just the elderly. We can demonstrate the reasons for the positive relationships found or the reasons for the state of well-being in religious people as follows:

- i. Explaining some concerns about the aging process in the elderly to the holy being they believe.
- ii. Believing that the divine entity that one believes will help him and the inner peace that this brings.
- iii. Seeing death as a reality and seeing death as a meeting with a divine being in the dimension of one's own piety (in some religions).
- iv. Increasing one's spirituality by participating in religious activities and getting away from the hustle and bustle of daily life.
- v. Praying creates a meditation effect on one's self.
- vi. Socialization of the person by participating in religious activities.
- vii. Wanting to get rid of the mistakes made in the past, wanting to make up for these mistakes in old age (before death), and relieving their conscience.
- viii. The belief in the hereafter, which is found in some religions, keeps the person away from worldly worries and sorrows.

One of the most important examples of studies explaining the relationship between religiosity and well-being is the longitudinal study by researchers Blazer and Palmore, which started in 1976 and lasted for 18 years. Blazer and Palmore found that in a community with a gradual decline in participation in religious activities but stable in religious attitudes, there was a positive correlation between religious activities, religious measures, feelings of happiness, usefulness, and personal adjustment, and personal adjustment and religion as the correlation increased during the study (18 years). It was concluded that the bond between the two was very strong [12]. As we can understand from the studies above, religious factors have a very important place in protecting mental health and reducing depression, anxiety, and stress. One of the biggest factors of the positive effect of religion on well-being is emotional and spiritual resilience, as we can see from the researches. The holy entity that the person believes in becomes a supportive entity that the person always believes, and trusts. This behavior is a strategy of emotional resilience, although the person is sometimes not aware of it. This type of behavior is very important, especially in the old age period when emotional resilience decreases. The lower level of life satisfaction and well-being of an older adult person than others in the community is also related to one's emotional resilience, and one way to increase emotional resilience is to hold a religious belief or strengthen spirituality.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this research article, the problems faced by older adults during the aging process, their mental and physical conditions, the concepts of spirituality, religion, religiosity, and the positive correlation between religion and well-being were discussed. To begin with, as the physical health of people deteriorates during old age, the rate of participation in physical activities decreases and this has a negative impact on the mental health of older adults. In addition, the concept of isolation has emerged as migration from rural to urban areas brings with it individualization and establishing families with fewer members than in the past. Although the young people who have kept up with this age are not aware of this, the old people have been and continue to be affected by loneliness due to the generation gap. In addition to all these, the old age psychology brought by retirement and the factors that I did not mention more is the factors that negatively affect mental health in the old age process. In order to overcome all these, the concept of religion and spirituality is an important concept for the elderly. Religious and spiritual activities can be a purpose for people in old age to hold on to life, at the same time, staying in touch with God or a holy being reduce the feeling of loneliness. Not feeling alone protects the person from depression and anxiety and thus supports the person's well-being. As seen in the researches, we can conclude that religious or spiritual activities increase the level of well-being of people, provide spiritual well-being, and positively affect mental health. Older adults' belief in a divine presence supports and increases their low emotional resilience, thereby improving their quality of life.



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