

European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

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Editorial

Dear colleagues, dear friends

As RISH team we look back to an intense time of work co-organizing two main conferences - the 5th European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health ECRSH in Gdansk (Poland) and the First National Conference on Spiritual Care in Bern, Switzerland. Furthermore we organised the 4-day research workshop with Prof. Dr. Harold Koenig and other experts.

In this newsletter we give you a short report on the ECRSH in Gdansk. Exemplary of many interesting contributions, we asked Prof. Dr. Julie Exline to provide a summary of her keynote lecture on "Spiritual Struggles and Spiritual Distress". We also want to thank the Polish co-organizers Dr. Katarzyna Skrzypinska, Dr. hab. Piotr Krakowiak and their team for their mutual cooperation and continuing efforts in organizing this significant event. Visit the post-conference website www.ecrsh.eu and benefit from the extensive download materials!

At the end of this newsletter you find further announcements of upcoming events. Please let us know about your conferences, projects and publications. Just send us an e-mail: info@rish.ch.

*René Hefti, MD
Oliver Merz, DTh*

Topics

Conference Report ECRSH 2016 in Gdansk, Poland

The 5th European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health ECRSH16 took place from May 12 to 14 in Gdansk, situated in northern Poland on the Baltic Sea. The conference was organized by the Research Institute of Spirituality and Health RISH in cooperation with the Institute of Psychology of the University of Ddansk, Dr. Katarzyna Skrzypinska, Dr. hab. Piotr Krakowiak and their team. The topic of the conference

was „Religion and Spirituality in Health Care: Risk or Benefit for the Patient?“ It was a great gathering of about 120 researchers and health professionals of many nations, exchanging their expertise and research.

Scientific Programme

The scientific programme consisted of 10 keynote lectures, including a special Gdansk lecture, 7 symposia, 4 free-communication sessions and a poster exhibition. The keynote speakers pointed out topics like role and efficacy of prayer in health care;



spiritual struggles and religious coping; religion, culture and migration, spirituality in geriatric and nursing care; religion and therapeutic relationship; spiritual care and its benefits and challenges. The Gdansk lecture, given by Prof. Dr Halina Grzymala-Moszczyńska (Poland), provided an comprehensive overview on the migration and its consequences for health considering the role of religion. This public lecture was accompanied by professional musical performance with piano and flute.



Beside the official scientific programme there was a lot of informal exchange

amongst the participants strengthening and promoting the European and International network.

Social and Cultural Programme

The local organizing committee prepared a beautiful social and cultural programme containing a guided tour through the impressive exhibition at the "European Solidarity Center", a nice dinner with music, a trip to the Old Town of Gdansk and to the world's largest brick castle in Malbork.

Feedbacks of Participants

Two and a half days packed with programme, personal conversations and Gdansk culture left many positive impressions. One participant wrote in his feedback form: "I felt privileged to meet so many interesting and inspiring people and to learn so much from them, and to make so many real friends". Another participant wrote: "I felt very welcomed in Gdansk and enjoyed the atmosphere of the conference".

Future Perspectives

Participants from many different countries (European and international) confirmed the need for this unique scientific and interdisciplinary platform. Therefore we are encouraged to continue this biannual conference. Several groups (countries) were ready to host our next event. As a conference committee we decided to follow the invitation of Coventry University, England (Dr. Deborah Lycett and her team).

Beside academic collaborations we think of establishing a European society promoting religion, spirituality and health research, education and clinical application in Europe (organizing conferences, supporting research projects, developing guidelines and facilitating academic careers).

Post-Conference Website

You can find abstracts, slides, video and audio recordings, the complete conference folder and also pictures of the conference on: www.ecrsh.eu. So please check back.

Oliver Merz and René Hefti

Spiritual Struggles and Spiritual Distress - Keynote by Julie Exlines

Although many people view religion and spirituality as sources of comfort and hope, it is also common for people to experience struggles around religious/spiritual issues. For example, they may find themselves disagreeing with members of a religious group, or they may have doubts about their faith or negative feelings focused on a deity.

Back in the late 1990s when I began this research, few researchers were focusing on the difficult side of religious life. In recent years, I have had the opportunity to work with a team of graduate students, post-docs, and colleagues to study religious/spiritual (r/s) struggles as part of a grant funded by the John Templeton Foundation (#36094). Our hope is that examining r/s struggles can help to provide a more full and nuanced picture of people's experiences around religion and spirituality.

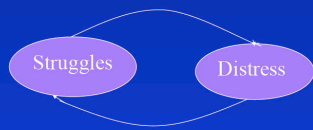
New Measure: Religious and Spiritual Struggles (RSS) Scale

- 26 items
- 6 subscales
- Can focus on specific timeframe (e.g., past week, past month) or specific event

For research and clinical purposes, it would be helpful to have a broad-based measure of r/s struggles that is still relatively brief. Our research team recently developed the Religious and Spiritual Struggles Scale (RSS; Exline, Pargament, Grubbs, & Yali, 2014), a 26-item measure that taps six domains of r/s struggles: divine, demonic, inter-personal, moral, ultimate meaning, and doubt. To date, the measure has shown good performance among Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and nonbeliever samples. We are now working on a brief version of the scale.

Spiritual Struggles and Distress

- Spiritual struggles correlate with difficulties in:
 - Mental health (depression, anxiety, stress, anger)
 - Physical health (pain, immune functioning, mortality rates)
 - Self-regulation (eating, substance use, pornography use)
- A few longitudinal studies
 - Struggles predict distress and vice versa



Because r/s struggles involve distress around issues of faith, one would expect them to correlate positively with other indicators

of distress, such as symptoms of anxiety, depression, and anger, and with physical symptoms. There are many studies showing such links, and longitudinal studies provide preliminary evidence that r/s struggles predict increases in emotional distress and vice versa (see Exline, 2013, for a recent review).



Even though r/s struggles such as anger toward God are very common, many people may be afraid to admit to such feelings because they see them as morally wrong (Exline, Kaplan, & Grubbs, 2012) or socially unacceptable. Although there is no one single remedy for r/s struggles, it is usually helpful to normalize such struggles to help diffuse the stigma and secrecy that often surround them.

Although distressing, r/s struggles also carry the potential to promote personal and spiritual growth. Such struggles may ultimately provide great benefit if they challenge people to relate to themselves, the divine, and other people in new ways that promote greater personal wholeness/connectedness.

References

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Bio sketch

Julie Exline is currently a Professor in the Department of Psychological Sciences at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. She is a licensed clinical psychologist and has been certified as a spiritual director from the Ignatian Spirituality Institute at John Carroll University. Her research focuses on religious and spiritual struggles, supernatural attributions, and virtues such as humility and forgiveness. Much of her research has been funded by the John Templeton Foundation. She has served as President of Division 36 of the American Psychological Association (Psychology of Religion and Spirituality).

Announcements

Meetings & Conferences

(Save the dates!)

Colloque Soins et Spiritualité: Evolutions à l'occasion du départ de Cosette Odier
November 18, 2016; Lausanne/Switzerland;
Information: Cosette.Odier@chuv.ch.

2nd National Conference on Spiritual Care together with IGGs Annual Meeting
October 27-28, 2017; Zurich/Switzerland;
further information follows.

6th European Conference on Religion, Spirituality and Health ECRSH18
Coventry/England; May 2018; for further information see www.ecrsh.eu (soon).

Pre-Conference Research Workshop with Prof. Harold G. Koenig and other experts
Coventry/England; May 2018; further information contact rene.hefti@rish.ch.

Imprint

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