

European Network of Research on Religion, Spirituality and Health

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Editorial

Dear colleagues, dear friends

Our next Newsletter is born and ready to be distributed. The focus will be on Sweden. First Professor Valery DeMarinis from Uppsala University will give us a survey of spirituality in postmodern Sweden. Second we are going to present a research article on "Spiritual Support for Palliative Care Patients" by Susan Strang, Sahlgrenska University Hospital, Gothenbrug, Sweden.

End of August we had the opportunity to attend the IAPR Conference in Leuven, Belgium. It was encouraging to hear about the big number of research projects and groups in Europe and to meet some of them. We would like to encourage you to become a member of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion (IAPR, www.iapr.de).

In September 2007 we are planning a European Conference on "Religion, Spirituality and Health" as well as a 3 to 4-day "Research Workshop" with Prof. Harold Koenig in Switzerland (see announcements).

René Hefti, M.D.

Topic

Spirituality in Sweden in the first decade of the 21st century

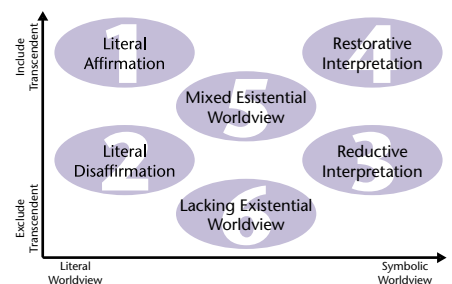
To understand spirituality in Sweden it is necessary to understand three things. First, Sweden can be considered to be an exemplary postmodern country. This means that there is a high standard of living, an integrated welfare system, a high respect for democracy and self-expression, a high sense of perceived well-being, and a steady decline of traditional religion in the general

population. In 2000 the status of the Protestant, Lutheran-based Church of Sweden was formally changed from being the state church to being a religious denomination alongside other Christian, Jewish and Muslim traditions as well as Hindu, Buddhist and other faith groups. The majority of ethnic Swedes report, in nationally representative studies such as the World Values Survey, that a very low percentage attends church or believe that a traditional belief in God is important. However, this is not to say that there is no belief in a higher power or unifying force. This is to say that for the past two decades, in accordance with other cultural changes, the majority of ethnic Swedes express their spirituality and or religiosity through a more privatized format. For non-ethnic Swedes, roughly comprising one-ninth of the total population of nine million, expressions of spirituality are varied from traditionally religious to privatized religious and also non-religious spiritual expressions.

In such a postmodern context as Sweden has become, one can find expressions of spirituality that are based on ways of making meaning, worldviews, across a wide spectrum. The following typology of worldviews in Sweden has resulted from a nationally-funded research study conducted in 1998 through Uppsala University.

The typology cannot give exact percentages of how many fall into each category, rather it is meant to provide an idea of the variety of different worldviews present, each with its resulting way of making meaning and spiritual expression. In categories 1 and 4 there is a belief in a transcendent power. Category 1 has a more literal worldview, reflecting a religiosity and spirituality of a more fundamentalist nature. Category 4 has a more symbolic worldview, reflecting a religiosity and spirituality more open to interpretation. Category 2 has a more fundamental, literal belief system that absolutely excludes the transcen-

dent, perhaps replacing belief in God or a higher power with belief in the ultimate power of extreme science or another type of absolute system. Category 3 has a more symbolic interpretation of non-belief in the transcendent. A person in Category 3 has tolerance for other worldviews and ways of meaning making. Category 5 is the fastest growing, whereby worldview contents may be drawn from two or more different categories. In this category, there are different belief systems that the individual or group uses to make sense of the different "worlds" or situations he or she encounters. Critically important here is the presence, in each category, of a functioning sub-group context that provides a collective dimension of worldview construction, once provided in a more unified worldview from the larger culture.



Category 6 needs to be seen from another perspective. Individuals falling into this category, most frequently but not exclusively, teens and young adults from both ethnic Swedish and other ethnic backgrounds do not have the means for constructing a worldview that makes meaning possible. This category is defined by a lack of meaning-making resources. Category 6 can best be thought of as the shadow side of postmodern freedom and the decline of traditional societal institutions' systems of meaning at a time when a foundation of meaning and belonging are most needed.

This typology of worldviews for Sweden calls attention to the need for ongoing

ing research and societal attention to how worldviews are being constructed and the consequences of different expressions of spirituality. In this sense, spirituality and worldview construction need to be seen as part of a public health agenda for 21st century. What happens when cultural institutions and systems of meaning begin to breakdown for ever-growing segments of a population? Where is societal responsibility to be located for spiritual health and meaning-making constructions and practices? In closing, it can be argued that Sweden provides an important test-case for the area of cultural and existential public health in a postmodern cultural context.

Valerie DeMarinis
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Forum

Spiritual Support for Palliative Care Patients – a Duty for Hospital Chaplains and Health Care Staff?

Most crises related to severe illness are mainly of an existential nature. In such situations, healthcare staff have a situation-bound responsibility to support the patient, but may find the situation very difficult. The aim of the study (published 2006) was to explore how the experts, i.e. members of the hospital chaplaincy define the difference between specific “professional” spiritual support, when the hospital chaplaincy should be involved and more “general” spiritual care that can be delivered by healthcare staff. Therefore a Swedish national survey using an open-ended questionnaire and a combined qualitative and quantitative content analysis was performed. Categories were inductively developed from open-ended questions to three main domains. 172 Swedish hospital chaplains took part. The chaplains defined the core of their professional help to be deeper soul care of a therapeutic nature and the handling of religious and symbolic issues including blessings, sacraments and rituals. Furthermore, they also gave priority to general psychosocial problems. The kind of spiritual support that can be offered by healthcare staff included supportive talks on existential issues such as meaning, life and death, “why-questions” and, the vulnerability of life. Furthermore

the staff should acknowledge the patient, listen actively and just be a fellow human being. Medical and social support were also considered to be an important basis for spiritual well-being.

We can conclude that the hospital chaplaincy should be a self-evident part of the team, but hospital staff should also have the capability to handle basic questions relating to spiritual welfare.

The study is published in *Supportive Palliative Cancer Care* 2006, 2: 55-64, www.supportivepalliativecancercare.com

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News

IAPR Conference 2006

The conference of the International Association for the Psychology of Religion was held in Leuven, Belgium from August 27th to August 31st 2006. About 150 participants from European and other countries attended the conference. A broad variety of topics such as religious experience, religion and therapy, attachment and religion, religious coping, Structure-of-Religiosity-Test (SRT), religion and brain-research, prayer research, concepts of God have been presented in main lectures and panels. Some of the presentations will be published in the *Archive for the Psychology of Religion* (www.iapr.de).

Franz Fischer

XPsy now available

XPsy is a computerprogram for presenting questionnaires by computer, calculating scale and norm values, presenting results and exporting data in SPSS-files. XPsy is developed for clinicians as well as for researchers.

Some moduls with questionnaires on religion are available already, e.g. the Structure-of-Religiosity-Test (SRT). Others can easily be implemented.

Further information and the download of the program with utilities are available at www.xpsy.eu.

Franz Fischer

Announcements

European Conference on “Religion, Spirituality and Health” with Prof. Harold Koenig, September 2007

The focus of the conference is to gather European researchers in the field of “Religion, Spirituality and Health” in order to strengthen the network and give them the opportunity to present their research projects. Prof. Koenig will inform us about new developments in the United States and offer mentorship meetings for individuals and research groups.

Research Workshop on “Religion, Spirituality and Health” with Prof. Harold Koenig, September 2007

Preceding the above announced conference there will be the opportunity to participate in a 3 to 4-day research workshop with Prof. Koenig, accepting participants of any education level or degree.

Conference and Workshop are organised by the Research Institute for Spirituality and Health; Contact: René Hefti, M.D., E-mail: info@rish.ch, www.rish.ch

New Publication

Zwingmann, C. et al. (2006). Positive and Negative Religious Coping in German Breast Cancer Patients. *Journal for Behavioral Medicine*.

Impressum

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