

# THE MEROS CENTER

## *Religious and Spiritual Determinants of Health – An Overview*

Religious and spiritual determinants of health are well-established and necessary foundations for understanding health and relationships.

### **History**

- The impact of Christianity on physical and mental health has been advocated for and described by faith leaders and medical experts since the first century.
- Research highlighting the association of faith and health has been published in elite, peer reviewed scholarly medical journals as far back as the 1800s.
- Published findings are primarily positive, consistent with psychosocial theories of health, include religiously and sociodemographically diverse study populations, and have been confirmed by comprehensive reviews and expert panels.

*from Levin. (2016) "For They Knew Not What It Was": Rethinking the Tacit Narrative History of Religion and Health Research. Journal of Religion and Health, 56, 28-46.*

### **Spirituality & Religiosity**

- Spirituality is the broader term referring to an individual experience of "sacredness"
- Religiosity is the set of beliefs connected to organized religious traditions
- These are distinct yet overlap in how they are used and applied
- Incorporates multi-dimensional factors when considering beliefs and practices (ex. prayer, worship attendance, etc.)

*from Oman. (2018) Why Religion and Spirituality Matter for Public Health. Springer Publishing.*

### **Religion and/or Spirituality can include:**

- Affiliation
- Attitudes
- Experiences
- Commitment
- Motivation
- Rituals
- Service attendance
- Prayer
- Scripture reading/study
- Religious giving
- Knowledge
- Coping
- Love
- Relationship

*from Koenig et al. (2012) Handbook for Religion and Health. 2nd. Ed. Oxford Publishing*

### **Biblical Truths that Underlie Human Relationships and Health**

- Image of God and Dignity (Origin)
- Law and Gospel (Identity)
- Service and Vocation (Purpose)
- Reconciliation and Redemption (Destiny)
- Justice and Mercy (Community)
- Compassion and Grace (Love)

*This resource was developed with input from our Meros Scholars, and is current as of Nov 2023.*

## Importance of Religion and/or Spirituality in Research

- Informs how we understand and respond to poverty
- Evaluates underlying assumptions between faith and health
- To better understand the pathways between spiritual and physical well-being
- Improves health theories that better integrate religion/spirituality/faith

*from Offutt & Reynolds. (2019) Christian Ideas of Development. Christian Relief, Development, and Advocacy: The Journal of the Accord Network, 1(1), 1-14.*

**\*Meros Comment:** Religion/Spirituality also helps us understand human flourishing from the perspective of multiple cultures.

## Summary of the Evidence

- Most longitudinal studies identify a protective effect of religion or spirituality factors on physical and mental health, quality of life and longevity.
- More frequent religious service attendance is associated with biological markers of health leading to clinically significant decrease in mortality and improvement in other health outcomes – comparable to the health effects of higher socioeconomic status, cholesterol lowering medications, and eating fruits and vegetables.
- Religion/spirituality appears to be protective against depression, alcohol and substance use, as well as suicidal attempts and death by suicide.
- It is unclear to what extent religious interventions may reduce depressive symptoms or enhance alcohol or substance abuse recovery.
- Relationships between religion/spirituality and anxiety or psychotic disorders are not conclusive and more research is needed.
- Negative religious coping and religious struggles have been shown to increase the intensity of mental health symptoms and are associated with poorer health.

*from Lucchetti, Peres, & Damiano. (2019) Spirituality, Religiousness and Health: From Research to Clinical Practice. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.*

**\*Meros Comment:** Most research studies have used a cross-sectional design, which make it difficult to establish causation or eliminate confounding.

## Common Measures of Religion and/or Spirituality

- Multidimensional Measure of Religiousness/Spirituality (MMRS)
- Intrinsic Religiosity Scale
- Duke University Religion Index (DUREL)
- Religious Orientation Scale
- Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWB)
- Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity
- Functional Assessment of Chronic Illness Therapy--Spiritual Well-Being Scale (FACIT-Sp)
- Daily Spiritual Experiences Scale (DSES)
- Love from God Scales
- Attachment/Relationship to God Scales
- Religious Coping (RCOPE)
- Religious Coping Index (RCI)

*from Koenig. (2012) Spirituality and health research: Methods, measurements, statistics, and resources. Templeton Foundation Press.*

## Additional Resources

### Reference Textbooks

- Idler. (2014) *Religion as a Spiritual Determinant of Public Health*. Oxford University Press.
- Koenig et al. (2012) *Handbook for Religion and Health*. 2nd. Ed. Oxford Publishing
- Koenig. (2012) *Spirituality and health research: Methods, measurements, statistics, and resources*. Templeton Foundation Press.
- Lucchetti, Peres, & Damiano. (2019) *Spirituality, Religiousness and Health: From Research to Clinical Practice*. Switzerland: Springer International Publishing.
- Omen. (2018) *Why Religion and Spirituality Matter for Public Health*. Springer Publishing.

### Important/Seminal Articles

- Balboni, T. A., VanderWeele, T. J., Doan-Soares, S. D., Long, K. N., Ferrell, B. R., Fitchett, G., Koenig, H.G., Bain, P.A., Puchalski, C., Steihauser, K.E. and Sulmasy, D.P., & Koh, H. K. (2022). Spirituality in serious illness and health. *JAMA*, 328(2), 184-197.  
([full text link](#))
- Koenig, H. G. (2015) Religion, spirituality and health: Review and update. *Advances in Mind-Body Medicine*. 29(3):19-26
- Larson, D. B., Pattison, E. M., Blazer, D. G., Omran, A. R., & Kaplan, B. H. (1986). Systematic analysis of research on religious variables in four major psychiatric journals, 1978-1982. *American Journal of Psychiatry*. 143:329-334.  
([full text link](#))
- Levin, J. S. (2003). Spiritual determinants of health and healing: An epidemiologic perspective on salutogenic mechanisms. *Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine*. 9(6):48-57.  
([full text link](#))
- Sloan, R. P., Bagiella, E., & Powell, T. (1999) Religion, spirituality, and medicine. *The Lancet*. 353:664-667.  
([full text link](#))
- VanderWeele, T. J. (2017). Religious Communities and Human Flourishing. *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 26(5), 476-481.  
([full text link](#))

### Organizations/Websites

- Baylor Institute for Studies of Religion ([baylorisr.org](http://baylorisr.org))
- Christian Connections for International Health ([ccih.org](http://ccih.org))
- Christian Global Health in Perspectives course ([cghiperspective.com](http://cghiperspective.com))
- Duke Center for Spirituality, Theology, and Health ([spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu](http://spiritualityandhealth.duke.edu))
- Harvard Human Flourishing Program ([hfh.fas.harvard.edu](http://hfh.fas.harvard.edu))
- The Meros Center ([meroscenter.org](http://meroscenter.org))
- Public Health, Religion, and Spirituality Network ([publichealthrs.org](http://publichealthrs.org))
- The Templeton Foundation ([templeton.org](http://templeton.org))

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