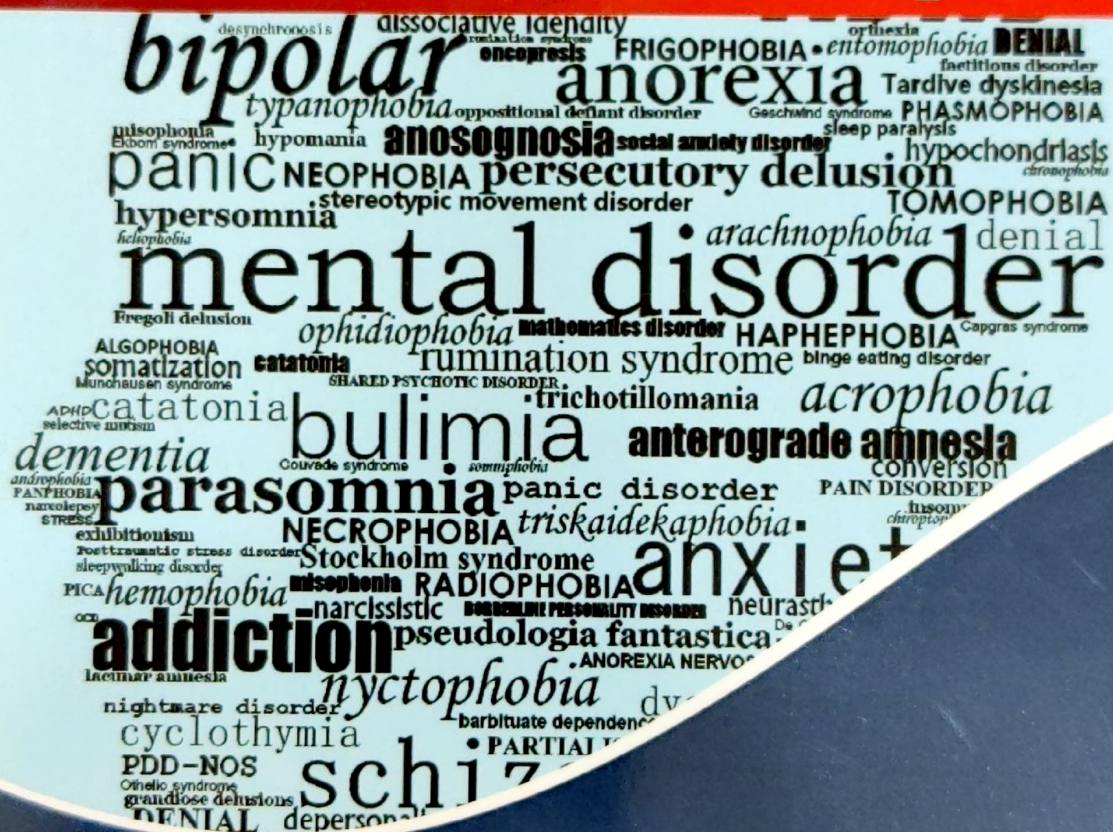


A Psychological Perspective



Dr. Satchit Prasun Mandal

Adaptability in Crisis:

A Psychological Perspective

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Spirituality Can Help Alleviate Physical and Mental Health Problems Resulting From COVID-19 Pandemic

Mithilesh Kumar Tiwari¹, Sweta Pathak², Tushar Singh³,
Yogesh K Arya³, Benkat Krishan Bharti³ and Satchit Prasun Mandal⁴

Abstract

Covid-19 has posed a serious challenge to mankind. Unavailability of adequate knowledge about Covid-19 caused a lot of challenges in every aspect of human behavior. Professionals from across the disciplines attempted to understand present pandemic in variety of ways. To address the psychological issues emerging from such pandemic, various ways have been introduced by psychologist and mental health professionals. Spirituality is one of the core human values and having potential in determining behavior (Cognition as well as affect), in managing distressful situation, and in leading a positive & satisfied life. Despite its potential role in managing human psyche during such pandemic time, it is under explored in the current literature. Therefore, present article is a theoretical exploration of potential role of spiritual and religious based practices to address the current pandemic time.

Keywords: Covid-19, Pandemic, Spirituality, Human Behavior

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Introduction

Covid-19 (Novel Corona Virus, SARS-CoV-2) has posed severe challenges to human health across the globe. As of now, a total of 1.76 Million people all over the world have lost their life due to covid-19 (WHO, 27th December 2020). The impact and consequences of covid-19 are limited to physical health problems and death; instead, it has significantly affected the psychological health of the entire populace. Besides, every sphere of human life (i.e., academic, economic, social) were ominously affected (Xiong et al., 2020) by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Due to its contagious nature and presence in various countries around the globe, and because of the unavailability of proper prognosis, shortage of resources such as testing kits, physical resources as well as human resources, treatment, and the vaccine against Coronavirus, various other precautionary measures such as social distancing, lockdown, and closure of all socio-economic activities were imposed by governments that have resulted in emotional distress and increased risks for psychological problems such as insomnia, denial, substance use, little physical exercise and activities, and other dependency disorders (Mohindra et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020b, Torales et al., 2020; Kaur, Singh, Arya & Mittal, 2020; Jurak et al., 2020) among the affected citizens. Also, some studies have shown increased suicide risks among various age groups across the world (Xiang et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2020). These countrywide restrictions and lockdown imposed due to the outbreak of Coronavirus have led to the feeling of uncertainty and helplessness (Serafini, 2020). Apart from the general public being affected due to this pandemic outbreak, healthcare facilities across continents become overloaded, and healthcare professionals were found to be highly stressed and suffered various psychological problems (Jaiswal, Singh & Arya, 2020; Philip & Cherian, 2020).

However, even though these uncertainty imposed problems, there was a section of the population, which did not capitulate to any disorder or health-related issues per se; instead, they are managing such adversities in a positive way (Pfefferbaum & North, 2020).

In their review, Jaiswal et al. (2020) suggested that various types of character strengths, which are collectively referred to as “Psychological Antibodies,” are useful in dealing with such adversities in a very positive manner. A plethora of empirical investigations suggesting a positive impact of psychological capital on moderating health-related issues. These psychological capitals either work as a buffer or cushion against adverse events of life or provide inner support so that individuals can manage their life in a positive sense (Panchal et al., 2016; Conversano et al., 2010).

Among various other positive approaches to deal with such adversities, spirituality is one of the ways in which people develop resilience to manage their life in a better way during such a stressful situation. According to Southwick and Charney (2018), Spiritual or religious practice is a critical component of individual resilience.

Spirituality and Health

Addressing spiritual concerns becomes even more critical because such a biological crisis like Covid-19 poses a severe threat not only to human health but at the broader level of psychological, social, economic, or in other words, it becomes existential concerns. An empirical exploration of spirituality and religious beliefs on health-related concerns is a relatively nascent area; yet, researches suggested that these beliefs have positive impacts on the health, coping, and recovery from disease, death, and bereavement process (Albers et al. 2010; Puchalski, 2004, Phelps et al. 2009). There is an increasing trend in utilizing spiritual or religious beliefs in clinical practices (Best et al., 2015).

Drawing boundaries around spirituality and defining it is very hard; however, researchers have a common consensus that it is very personal. It is generally defined as “searching for greater meaning in the life, worthiness and transcendental way of life” (International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement, 1990) or search for a “higher sense” with regards to religion or belief in God (Mishra et al. 2017).

Various empirical studies have found that religiosity/spirituality have a significant relationship with physical as well as mental health of the individual such as diabetes (Zaldivar and Smolowitz, 1994; Fitchett et al., 2004), heart/cardiovascular diseases (Hughes et al., 2004; Ai et al., 2007), cancer (Yoshimoto, Ghorbani & Baer, 2006; Shaw, Han & Kim, 2007). Koenig (2009) and Boneli & Koenig (2013), in their exhaustive and elaborative review, have concluded that an inverse relationship between religiosity/spirituality and various mental health-related issues (i.e., depression, anxiety, suicide attempts) exists and it helps in fostering quality of life, better recovery. Koenig (2009) reviewed various empirical evidence about religiosity/spirituality and well-being or happiness and found a robust relationship between them. He found that about 82% of studies reported a positive relationship between spirituality and well-being. In the case of depression, 61% of studies reported a negative relationship between depression and spirituality, and 63% of clinical trials found that religiosity/spirituality based healthcare interventions have better outcomes than controlled conditions.

Explaining the mechanism through which religiosity/spirituality helps individuals deal with such adverse situations, Koenig (2009) summarized that spirituality makes available positive coping resources, optimistic worldview, sense of control, and religious doctrines that guide individuals' behavior, compassion, and altruism, etc. In other words, patients with stronger religious/spiritual beliefs have a better understanding of their illness, embrace adversities more positively and enjoy life despite sufferings and pain (Puchalski et al. 2014.). It is apparent from the above empirical evidence that religiosity/spirituality has a very promising impact on physical and mental health. Despite some methodological constraints, studies concluding that religiosity/spirituality have positive outcomes in preventing risky health behaviors, effective management of illness, and have a faster recovery process.

COVID-19 Pandemic, Spirituality and Health:

During pandemic situations, concerns for psychological health become secondary, especially in developing countries. Historical

evidence of pandemics and epidemics (like Ebola, SARS, etc.) were examples of when mental health got neglected (Roy et al., 2020), and the detrimental outcomes of such pandemics last even for a more extended period. Thus, in such grave times, a proper and comprehensive mechanism and strategies to address & protect the mental health of individuals are very necessary. Positive psychological capitals (i.e., optimism, hope, resiliency) play an essential role in moderating any health crisis's impact. Pandemic like Covid-19 presented a severe challenge to human health (Mohindra et al., 2020; Xiao et al., 2020b, Torales et al., 2020; Kaur, Singh, Arya & Mittal, 2020; Jurak et al., 2020) and psychological capitals (i.e., hope, optimism, resiliency) as well as religiosity/spirituality found to have a significant effect upon this health crisis and its effective management. It is seen as a promising factor that moderates onset, progression, and recovery of illness (Koenig, 2009; Puchalski et al., 2014).

Apart from the disease's physical aspect, individuals suffer a lot due to such existential questions, which shakes their deepest inner soul. Thus, incorporating the patients' spiritual needs into the modern treatment system becomes very necessary (Puchalski, 2001). Fostering spiritual needs-based treatment allows healthcare professionals to help the patients discover answers to their existential queries in more positive and satisfying ways. These spiritual or religious belief systems help the patients develop a positive attitude towards their suffering or illness, which in turn let them manage problems effectively. Through self-discipline or control, spiritual beliefs help individuals not indulging in specific negative and harmful behavior or faster recovery from particular illness (Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002; Sephton, Koopman, Shaal, Thoresen, & Spiegel, 2001).

Religious or spirituality-based practices allow individuals to experience more positive emotions, enhancing their self-worth, which leads to developing resiliency and self-efficacy, which helps individuals maintain their health more positively. Self-acceptance and sense of meaning or worth of life components of spirituality

enable individuals to explore their existential questions of life and illness, and through this exploration, they can control over negativity due to illness or health crisis (Miller & Thoresen, 2003; Lin & Bauer-Wu, 2003; Olive, 2004; Stefanek, McDonald, & Hess, 2005).

Thus, addressing spiritual needs and beliefs in the health care system left a positive impact on the prognosis and recovery during a health crisis. Understanding patients' cultural, spiritual, and religious beliefs led healthcare professionals to provide their care and treatment up to a more satisfying level.

Various religious affiliations worldwide offer rich and fertile ground for exploring spirituality within that cultural and religious setting. Buddhism and Hinduism, particularly about the Indian sub-continent, have a detailed storehouse of rich knowledge about living life to reach transcendence or Moksha. The four noble truths (the existence of suffering, that specific causes produce suffering, that the cessation of suffering is possible, and that there is a Path or Way to end suffering) in Buddhism and the concept of Dharma, Karma, Moksha, and Samsara in Hinduism offer great insight about life and death and how to reach the ultimate goal of life, i.e., Transcendence or Moksha. Thus, incorporating learning from such religious knowledge to understand spirituality and deliver spirituality based healthcare becomes the need of the hour (Whitman, 2007; Shultz).

During the Covid-19 outbreak, people suffering from this unknown virus have debilitating existential questions very much, staying alone in healthcare facilities, their spirituality and religious beliefs often shattered. Thus, in such a crisis, healthcare providers' spiritual care becomes a necessity, not a luxury.

Conclusion & Further Suggestions

The present article aimed to explore the role of religiosity/spirituality in managing health crises and the time of the pandemic. Most individuals have some religious/Spiritual orientation, which functions as a safeguard against various obstacles of life and health crisis. Covid-19 being a pandemic like others in the past seriously

challenges humanity, human health, and health care resources (Xiong et al., 2020; Mohindra et al., 2020).

Since spirituality and religious beliefs based treatment and care are in a very nascent phase, we need a comprehensive theoretical model and intervention strategies, which are direly needed. Few instruments (FICA tool, Puchalski & Romer, 2000; and BELIEF, McEvoy, 2000) to assess spiritual needs and beliefs have been developed, and these instruments were found to be reliable in the assessment of patients' religious/spiritual orientation. However, there is a dearth of empirical approaches about spiritual needs and belief-based treatment, care, or intervention strategies, so that such concerns of patients and the general public may be addressed effectively during both normal and crisis time. Such spirituality based elements may also be incorporated into other established therapeutic intervention strategies such as Mindfulness-based intervention.

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This book is a compilation of empirical research and review papers, which focuses on pertinent issues of the current situation. The articles have been contributed by different researchers and experienced academicians from all over the country. The articles are thoroughly based on their original research work presented during the Two Day National Conference titled "**Adaptability In Crisis: Psychology, Education And Society**" organized by the Department of Psychology, Rajiv Gandhi University (A Central University), Arunachal Pradesh, India on the 17th & 18th of August 2021 through virtual mode.

The objective of the book is to highlight various issues related to the present COVID-19 pandemic to foster better preparedness and adaptability in crisis. The chapters delve on the themes of Physical & Mental Health, Health Care System, Work-Life Balance, Resilience, Coping Skills and Effects of COVID-19 on Mental Health. It consists of selected unpublished articles of diverse aspects of psychological and overall mental health highly relevant on both individual and community levels in every sphere of life. The findings will also contribute to public welfare and policy documentation for the Government.



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