PROMOTING CONSCIOUS AND ACTIVE LEARNING AND AGING

HOW TO FACE CURRENT AND FUTURE CHALLENGES?

ALBERTINA LIMA OLIVEIRA (COORD.)
AGING, HEALTH AND DISEASE: THE EFFECT OF RELIGIOSITY ON THE OPTIMISM OF ELDERLY PEOPLE

Lisete dos Santos Mendes Mónica

Abstract

In the aging process religiosity has been shown to be associated with important benefits. In this paper we seek to analyse the agency factors of religiosity in optimism and its mediation in satisfaction with life in both healthy and ill elderly people. The sample surveyed by the CROP Questionnaire, consisting of 376 Portuguese elderly people, 238 classified as healthy and 138 as ill, showed that there is a positive relationship between religiosity and optimism only for the group of healthy elderly people. For the ill elderly, optimism was only promoted by satisfaction with life. The distinction between optimism of internality and externality showed that the healthy elderly anchor their optimism in internality beliefs, while the ill elderly base their optimism on external factors. The establishment of a self-regulating system is discussed with beliefs and religious practices as perpetuators. Confrontation with personal frailty, powerlessness, and fear were discussed as predetermining factors to disembedding, as described by Giddens (1991, 1997), while reembedding occurs with the elderly regaining self-control, as a result of divine factors prone to optimism.

Keywords: Religiosity; Optimism; Healthy elderly; Ill elderly.

“The religious phenomenon, although complex, is a very important factor for understanding different human societies, in time and space.
because all of them, in one way or another, have been shaped by religious thought" (Rodrigues, 2007, p. 171). Religion performs vital functions in such a way that it becomes inseparable from human existence (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009). Considering the analysis of the roles of religiosity and its impact on health, risk behaviours, and well-being as classic, research about the impact of religiosity on optimism in the elderly has been neglected. In this paper we compare the differences in religiosity and optimism of both healthy and ill elderly people. In addition, we analyse the impact that religiosity has on the optimism of both and we evaluate the mediating role of life satisfaction.

**Religiosity**

It is understood that religiosity is the individual level of commitment to beliefs, doctrines and practices of a religion (Baker & Warburg, 1998; Mookherjee, 1994). The counterpart expression of religious experience (Geerts, 1990), it concerns the extent to which an individual believes, follows, and practices a religious doctrine, viewed between its two regulating poles: beliefs and rites. James (1902/1985) defines it as “a set of feelings, acts and experiences of the individual (...) while situated in a relation which he considers divine” (p. 50). This can be introduced either in a traditional way, in a formal and non-reflective way and obeying customs, or in an individual way, looking for answers to questions, needs, ideas and ideals (Grom, 1994).

Both religion and religiosity have an expression resulting in spirituality, namely, recognition of a non-material force that transcends all affairs, human and nonhuman, materialized in the search for meaning, unity, and human transcendence (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Pargament, 1997). The concepts of spirituality and religion share a considerable overlap (Taylor, 1998), where we do not find existing consensus related to the conceptual delimitation of the former (Barros, 2000). Although many authors refer to religiosity using the term spirituality, the first differs from the latter by reference to a specific doctrinal system of...