

SPIRITUALITY AND HEALTH OF MEDICAL STUDENTS Spirituality and health of medicine students

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SUMMARY

Spirituality has been linked to medicine since ancient times, but over time beliefs regarding spirituality were replaced by scientism and technicality. In the field of medicine, this impact was very significant, as the act of caring is essential, and this care was gradually lost. Recent studies such as ATARI et al., (2020) have been evaluating the effects of spirituality, religious practice or adoption of spiritual practices such as meditation *mindfulness* by university students and observed various types of benefits in relation to mental health and quality of life such as body relaxation, quality of sleep, self-knowledge and well-being. This work aimed to analyze the possible relationship between spiritualist practice and the emotional stability of young people and how spirituality can contribute to the strengthening of medical students recently enrolled in the course and the challenge of preparing for admission exams. This is known to be a phase of a lot of pressure and anguish, given the wide competition and stress of candidates, and the research aims to probe how much the practice of a spiritualist activity could be useful or favor emotional control and focus on studies. A study was carried out of a quantitative-descriptive nature with 123 students entering the Medicine course who attended the 1st and 2nd semester of the years 2020 and 2021. Data were collected through a Google Forms questionnaire, with multiple choice questions and the consent form for data collection. Then, the data was tabulated in Microsoft Excel to stratify the responses and interpret the results. Of the students who responded that they practice some spiritual activity or meditation linked to spirituality, there was a discrepancy: 23.39% of them were able to maintain focus on their studies and managed the pressure of the entrance exam well against 12.9% of the group that did not practice any spiritual activity or declared themselves an atheist. Another parallel is that in the non-practicing group, 34.68% of them reported a lot of difficulty under the pressure of the entrance exams against only 19.85% of the group had a life with regular activity and spiritualist connection. The observed data infer that women are more involved with spiritualist and/or religious practices, but due to the reduced sample of men, any conclusion in relation to gender. In conclusion, we can state that the results obtained in the study suggest that it is possible to have spirituality as a resource to help with emotional management and maintain focus on studies, since the data allow us to associate a direct relationship between the practice of spirituality or (faith) and greater ability to withstand pressures such as studying for university entrance exams.

ABSTRACT

Spirituality has been linked to medicine since ancient times, but over time beliefs about spirituality were replaced by scientism and technicality. In the field of medicine, this impact was very significant, because the act of caring is essential, and this care was gradually lost. Recent studies such as the one by ATARI et al., (2020) have been evaluating the effects of adopting spiritual practices such as mindfulness meditation by university students and have observed various types of benefits in mental health, body relaxation, sleep quality, self-knowledge and well-being. be. This study aimed to analyze the possible relationship between spiritual practices and the emotional stability of young people and how spirituality can contribute to the strengthening of medical students who have just entered the course and the challenge of preparing for admission exams. This is known to be a phase of a lot of pressure and anguish, given the wide competition and stress of the candidates, as well as showing the students' relationship with spiritual or spiritual practices. A quantitative-descriptive study was carried out with 123 students entering the Medicine course who attended the 1st and 2nd semester of the years 2020 and 2021. Data were collected through a Google Forms questionnaire, with multiple-choice questions and the term of consent for data collection. Then, the data were tabulated in Microsoft Excel for the stratification of responses and interpretation of results. Of the students who answered that they practice some spiritual activity or meditation linked to spirituality, there was a discrepancy: 23.39% of them



managed to keep their focus on studies and managed well the pressure of the entrance exam against 12.9% of the group that does not practice any spiritualist activity. or declared himself an atheist. Another parallel is that the non-practicing group totaled 34.68% of them reported a lot of difficulty under the pressure of entrance exams against only 19.85% of the group that had a life with regular activity and spiritual connection. The observed data infer that women, are more involved with religious practices, but due to the small sample of man, any conclusion regarding gender was discarded. In conclusion, we can say that the results obtained in the study suggest that it is possible to have in spirituality a resource to assist in emotional management and maintain focus on studies, since the data allows associating a direct relationship between the practice of spirituality or (Faith) and the greater ability to withstand pressures such as studies for entrance exams.

1. INTRODUCTION

Since ancient times, the topic of spirituality has been linked to medicine for a long time. Some ancient people believed that illnesses were linked to supernatural forces and manifested themselves as a form of punishment. Over time, beliefs in spirituality were replaced by scientism and technicality. This impact was significant especially in the field of medicine, where the act of caring is essential. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC):

Spirituality is recognized as a factor that contributes to the health of many people. The concept of spirituality is found in all cultures and societies. It is expressed in individual searches for ultimate meaning through participation in religion and/or belief in God, family, naturalism, rationalism, humanism, and the arts. All of these factors can influence the way patients and healthcare professional caregivers perceive health and illness and how they interact with each other (APUD OLIVEIRA, 2017).

The discussion between the relationship between spirituality and medicine resumed in the 1990s with the inclusion of the subject in the curricula of US medical schools. Since then, research has recognized that spirituality can influence patient treatment and the medical relationship.

We know that Brazil is a country where religious worship still predominates, especially Catholic/Christian, despite a continuous and growing number of people with no connection or belief whatsoever (especially among younger people). Even so, the diversity of religions proliferates, culture is linked to spirituality through various symbolic, social and cultural rituals, often showing a syncretism and mixture of beliefs and perceptions. The country's medical schools are studying and adding the topic of spirituality little by little to their curricula and recognizing its importance during the professional training of students, so that they are able to recognize its importance and value with their patients and respect it, thus how to validate the impact on their own resilience and increase their workforce as doctors, with the resource of spirituality in their lives.

Although religiosity and spirituality are related, the concepts are distinct. Spirituality is often understood as a search for meaning in life and a relationship with something superior and divine, or not. For Lucchetti *et al.*, spirituality is a personal search for understanding human existential issues, such as the meaning of life and death, as well as their relationships with the sacred/transcendent, and this process is not necessarily related to religious practices. Religiosity is closely linked to adherence to practices that the individual follows, having a connection with a system of worship or doctrine. It can be understood as the way people experience religion.

According to Schuh *et al.* (2021), university students who practiced meditation *mindfulness* group obtained benefits in mental health (through greater concentration and focus on studies), relaxation body ment, reflecting in better sleep quality and self-knowledge, mental, spiritual and student well-being. The results of this study demonstrated the importance of actions like this, aiming at the health care of university students.

Dalai Lama, Buddhist monk, wrote in his book "Ethics for a New Millennium" (1999), that the Pirituality is related to qualities of the human spirit, such as compassion, patience, tolerance, harmony, responsibility, which offer happiness for oneself and others, he also adds "that's why I sometimes say that perhaps we can do without religion. What cannot be dispensed with are these basic spiritual qualities."

The Dalai Lama's speech and the study of Schuh *et al.* (2021), focus on the importance of spirituality

two

in life and how it can help people overcome moments of suffering, especially overcoming illnesses. Therefore, it is important to add the spiritual dimension to students' academic training, so that they recognize that their spirituality can affect the relationship and care with the patient. As Father Fábio de Melo quotes:

Spirituality is a form of our way of living faith. Let's say that spirituality is in line with your way of being. Spirituality is an unfolding of faith, it is a way in which I discover my spirituality to live faith (DE MELO,

2009).

The present work aimed to analyze the possible relationship between spiritualist practice and the emotional stability of young people and how spirituality can contribute to the strengthening of medical students recently enrolled in the course, faced with the challenge of preparing for admission exams, It is known to be a phase of a lot of pressure and anguish, given the wide competition and stress of candidates, as well as identifying the students' relationship with spiritual or spiritualist practices.

two. SPIRITUALITY AND RESILIENCE

Spirituality and health have been together since ancient times, with priests, shamans, healers, etc., for these comorbidities were linked to the interference of the gods, facts incomprehensible to the natural world. From the 16th century onwards, the emergence of techniques and instruments enabled a broader and more fragmented view of the human being. In this view, the health-disease process began to be analyzed from the point of view of biochemical imbalance, mainly through the use of drugs.

In an increasingly connected world, spirituality is gaining more and more space in fields of study. Humanity seeks a point of balance and instigates the real meaning of life in the face of liquid and increasingly technical relationships. Therefore, it is necessary to understand that spirituality can be a path to developing an awareness of being more responsible for oneself and others.

Therefore, since 1998, the World Health Organization has included the spiritual dimension in the multidimensional concept of health, as well as some medical schools around the world, which since the 90s have been discussing the inclusion of the topic in curricular discussions. Currently, with the level of advancement in science and technology, there are many studies that highlight the importance of spirituality in the practice of medicine.

This spirituality, which can contribute to the professional and personal development of students, can be developed through some simple precepts, such as through meditative practices, recognizing important values for your life, exercising gratitude and forgiveness, among others.

In oriental medicine, we can better understand this integration between spirituality, health and medicine. However, despite spirituality being considered an important factor for sick people, this issue has occupied different positions among professionals.

According to Borges *et. al.* (2013) Western medicine has taken three different stances on the topic. Negligence, considering these matters irrelevant; opposition, when characterizing patients' religious experiences as psychopathologies, and acceptance, where they accept spirituality as an important aspect in patient care.

With all technological advances and the search for therapeutic success based on specific drugs and genetic interference, spirituality has become marginalized in the shadow of the healing process. Pre-established diagnoses often fail to provide real benefit to patients, especially in cases of terminal life. In this aspect, spirituality and medicine can provide a path to relief from suffering in the process of accepting the patient's diagnosis and also providing comfort.

for your family members.

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This importance was described in a study by American Medical Colleges, which recommended a spirituality curriculum for medical courses, so that students understand the spiritual dimension of the patient and their relationship with the disease.

It is a fact that medical students are affected by great pressure when they enter the course and are often not prepared to deal with and welcome patients or themselves. Many develop unhealthy habits and end up leading to physical and mental exhaustion.

In the medical course, although medicine endorses a code of ethics and encourages a high level of

moral character among doctors, it is considered that medical students start college as idealists, but many of them feel that they leave college cold and indifferent. This is the biggest challenge of medical education, as moral development often stagnates or there is regression (MELO; SOUZA; BARBOSA, 2016).

Based on the importance of spirituality for medical students, in 2007 UNIFESP created an elective course, "Spirituality and Medicine" for undergraduate medical and nursing students. The discipline ranges from why we study spirituality in medicine to the great religions. With the aim of promoting the importance of the subject among future professionals and understanding its influence on patient treatment. In a research carried out by Velloso et. al., (2016) with medical and nursing students who participate in this elective subject linked to spirituality, it was found that 1/5 of the students indicated that they were agnostics and a small majority were atheists, with the main conceptions being among the male gender. Among women, medical students were agnostic or atheist.

In a survey carried out by Oliveira (2017), he pointed out that regarding teaching dedicated to spirituality and health in medical schools in Brazil, it revealed that 86 of the medical institutions in the country that participated, 9 offered specific courses on the subject, 4 as mandatory subjects and 5 as electives.

The Brazilian Association of Medical Education - ABEM, has a study group that discusses and delves deeper into the subject. Its members, made up of several universities, study the topic of "qualifying medical education to achieve better health practices, guided by the expanded concept of health, comprehensive care and respect for sociocultural diversity in medical schools".

In a work carried out by Borges et. al. (2013), highlights that 46.5% of the students who participated believe that spirituality is the belief in something that transcends matter. Likewise, they linked spirituality and health through the humanization of medicine (39.9%). Cultural and social aspects end up influencing the training of medical professionals and often, because they do not understand the subject, they move away from approaching the spirituality of their patients.

In another study carried out by Costa et. al., (2019), with 12 Brazilian medical schools and 473 students between 2010 and 2011, pointed out that when asked about what students understood by spirituality/religiosity, the answer that was most common was: search for meaning and meaning for human life, belief and relationship with God/religiosity and belief in something transcendent to matter. Of the total number of students who responded to the surveys, 88% believed that spirituality influenced the health of their patients and 58.4% agreed that the spirituality and religiosity of doctors interfere with the understanding of the health-disease process and the doctor-patient relationship.

A cross-sectional study carried out by Luchetti et. al., (2012), with all (180) Brazilian medical schools in the period from 2010 to 2011. It was found that 86 schools responded to contact attempts, one institution declared that it was not a relevant study and the remaining 94 did not respond. Of the 86 schools, only 4 had mandatory courses related to the subject and 5 had elective subjects. In relation to other ways of aborting the subject, 14 reported lectures given, 12 universities had professors who participated in subjects related to the subject of other courses, 4 held specific events and 2 wanted to implement a new course on spirituality in their curriculum. The same study stated that:

The results of the present study are surprising, considering that Brazil is a highly religious/spiritual country in which 83% of the population considers religion to be very important in their lives, 37% attend religious services at least once a week and 95% report an affiliation with a religious denomination. Despite this, however, there appears to be little teaching about spirituality and health in medical curricula (LUCHETTI et. al., 2012).

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In Brazil, 14% of medical schools have discussions regarding spirituality in their curricula through elective or mandatory subjects. According to Costa et. al., (2019), 29% of medical students believed that spirituality influences health. In this context of diversity of beliefs in which the country is inserted, it is important to recognize the influence of spirituality on health and treatment.

The ATARI study *et al.*, (2020) demonstrated the success achieved with meditative practice in the routine of medical students: in the pre-event, with 171 responses, 84.2% reported feeling anxious due to the pandemic and 59.6% reported difficulty sleeping. After the event, with 64 responses, 61.8% reported that meditations reduced anxiety symptoms and improved sleep.

3. METHODOLOGY

A quantitative-descriptive study was carried out with 123 students entering the Medicine course studying the 1st and 2nd semester of the years 2020 and 2021. The objective of the study was to evaluate the importance of spirituality for medical students, when dealing with patients and personal development to deal with adverse situations in the profession.

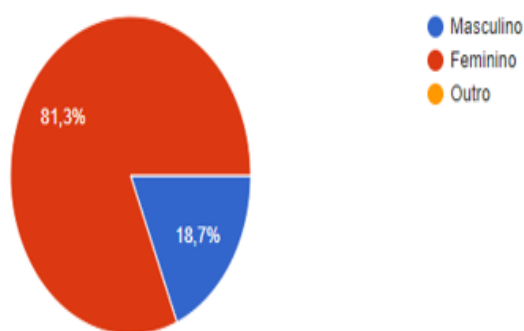
Data collection was carried out through a Google Forms questionnaire, with 16 multiple-choice questions and the consent form for data collection. Then, the data was tabulated in Microsoft Excel to stratify the responses to each question and create graphs illustrating the responses collected.

The results were evaluated and compared with the literature review carried out.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

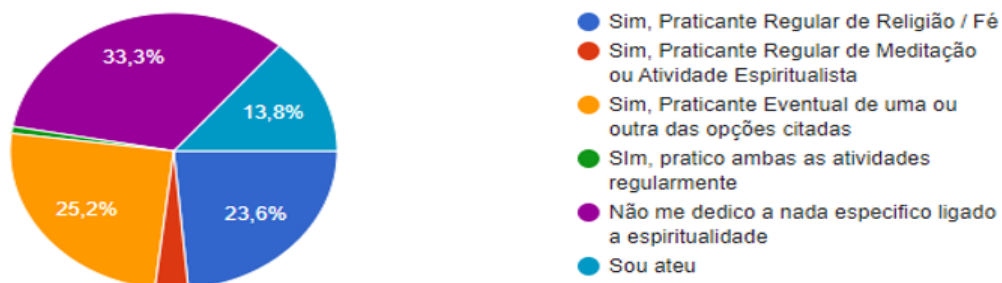
Among the 123 interviewees, all (100%) agreed to participate as volunteers in the research. The majority of participants (54.5%) are 18-20 years old and another large portion (34.1%) are between 21-24 years old. Other ages counted amount to less than 11.4%. Regarding gender, 81.3% are female and only 18.7% are male, responded to the comments.

Graphic 1: Students' gender



Source: prepared by the author, 2022.

Graph 2: Practice of religiosity/spirituality or faith among students



Source: prepared by the author, 2022.

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Regarding practices, the responses were very diverse. There was no large majority in the answer options. The largest volume (33.3%) were students who did not dedicate themselves to any specific spiritual rite. Another interesting percentage we obtained is in relation to atheists, where 13.8% of students considered themselves this way.

The relationship between younger people and the lack of practice of spirituality is inferred, since the majority are invested in the framework of practitioners with little frequency of religious or spiritual activity.

current. This increase in the lack of this spiritual or religious activity among new generations may impact the professional's future care, as spirituality can provide personal and professional development based on humanism, compassion and empathy, qualities valued by patients. Because of this, "Religious and spiritual beliefs have proven to be an auxiliary resource in coping with stressful events, such as the health-disease process, and in the treatment of the disease. Therefore, spirituality is essential in the training of health professionals" (OLIVEIRA, 2017).

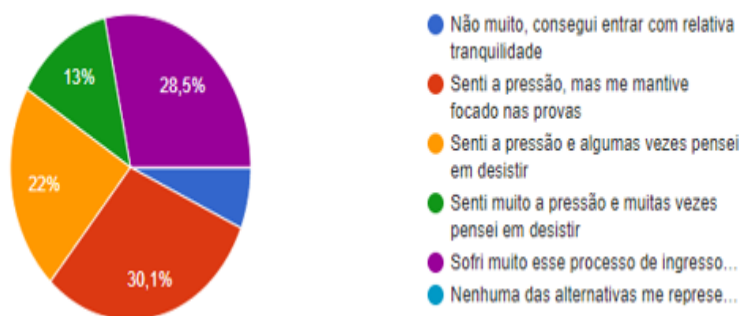
Of the students who responded that they practice some spiritual activity or meditation linked to spirituality, there was a discrepancy: 23.39% of them were able to maintain focus on their studies and managed the pressure of the entrance exam well compared to 12.9% of the group that did not practice any spiritual activity, or declared himself an atheist.

Another parallel is that the non-practicing group totaled 34.68% of them reporting a lot of difficulty under the pressure of the entrance exams compared to only 19.85% of the group that had a life with regular activity and spiritualist connection.

The data also infers that women are involved in religious or spiritual practices, but in relation to men it was not possible to establish a relationship given the discrepancy in the volume of male respondents, who are a minority. Given the importance of spirituality already reported here in patient care and in the doctor's professional and personal development, the data shows the need to highlight this practice as a relevant aspect for overcoming adversities in the profession. According to the assessment made by Haidet *et al.*, (2002) in medical schools, women who chose primary care specialties are more focused on patient-centered medicine. That said, it is interesting to note that in addition to being interested in spirituality, the female public also seeks to interact with people directly, being an interesting increase in the relationship and deepening of this topic with a more humanized and welcoming practice.

Science and technology often end up pushing aside topics such as spirituality in healthcare practice. No matter how small the percentage of atheists is, it represents a significant portion of students who may have fears or will not know how to deal correctly with the spiritual aspects of their patients in their treatments.

The development of spirituality can help students and recent graduates to face the pressures that medical professionals suffer when choosing a profession. Many students (30.1%) reported that they felt pressure during exams to enter the medical course. Followed by 28.5% of students who felt the pressure of the process a lot. The ATARI study *et al.*, (2020) showed the success of meditation practice in reducing anxiety and improving sleep among medical students.



Graph 3:pressure suffered by students in exams to enter the medical course

Source: prepared by the author, 2022.

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Spirituality is related to religiosity, but it is not the same concept and contributes to measures that alleviate the pressure that professionals and future health professionals may suffer throughout their career. Meditative practices can serve to introduce spirituality into students' daily lives, through their contributions that improve stress, concentration, anxiety and depression, however this practice is a minority among students who responded to the survey.

5. FINAL CONSIDERATIONS



Spirituality has been strongly influenced by the technological and scientific process in advance. ço. More and more people disregard spirituality as a complement to life. On the one hand we have the most advanced technological resources, which allow us to expand patient care and healing options through accurate diagnoses, on the other hand we have the lack of awareness on the part of professionals in understanding the beliefs and spirituality of their patients when throughout the treatment.

However, this picture has been distorted in order to place spirituality within discussions in medical academies, increasingly recognizing the importance of spirituality both in professional development and in dealing with patients.

The results obtained in the study suggest that spirituality is an extremely important resource to help with emotional management and maintain focus on studies. Therefore, more research needs to be carried out on this topic, in order to reintroduce more humane patient care into medical practice.

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