

Vulnerability and Courage: The Virtues for Spiritual Healing in Pandemic Time

V. Leuca Smilee¹, Dr. M. S. Joseph Antony Jacob²

¹MSW, Research scholar, Loyola College, Chennai

²Research supervisor, Department of social work, Loyola College, Chennai

ABSTRACT

This covid-19 pandemic has the shut doors of opportunities, relationships, openness, community living, optimistic thoughts, health, humanity, safety, etc., for many people all over the world. People have started to heap ideas for their very own self-preservation. Pandemic had its impact not only on people's physiological health but also on the way a person functions, comprising of emotional, social, mental, psychological, cultural, and especially spiritual. Spirituality is often overlapped with religiosity, vividly losing its meaning during the time of the pandemic. People believed, spirituality is always to believe in a higher power, but the core understanding of real spirituality is to show one's love for one's neighbor, especially to those who are in need. It means to direct one's life of service towards a vision of contributing to others, valuing one's importance in existence, finding and lending ways to make one and others happy respectively, analyzing the purpose and meaning of one's life. Many had the courage to engage in communal service as well. But pandemic compelled people to a battle between personal solitude and communal service. This article enlightens spiritual healing as a panacea to the people affected during pandemic time and the role of spirituality and health in the field of psychiatric social work.

Keywords: Covid-19 Pandemic, Spiritual healing, communal service, Psychiatric social work.

INTRODUCTION

The pandemic has made the entire world upside down kindling the dark and deepest fears of human beings. People tend to believe in all the false accusations of social media and feared death every moment. Since this Covid-19 virus is contagious, the bond shared between one another is in vain. They were deprived of normal living and started to experience solitude for a longer period of time. It made them feel uncertain about proceeding with their lives. Economic crises started to arise because of lockdown and people who relied on daily wages suffered famine of food, money, health. Also, people paid more attention to mental health and acknowledged its significance and many worked towards rectifying it. The government organized various Tele-counselling centers to support one another virtually and ensure oneness even in the separation. People had their unique customized coping mechanisms to overcome the situation. Some ceased watching the news that exaggerated the cause. Some denied the onset of pandemic complaining about the political system, some loaded their cupboards with piles of hand sanitizers obsessing cleanliness. Many seized the circumstance and made money out of it, for example, the insurance companies raised their premium amount in the name of

pandemic which made many of their subscribers withdraw from it. Also, people only with good status and monetary benefits had the privilege to get treatment in hospitals. It made us realize the contrast conduct of humans in times of crisis. Their actions were not because of lost Humanity but because of lost spirituality. They were unaware of the indulgence of divine love for one another in this universe. In the Indian context, Spirituality is often portrayed to be religious and people believed themselves as good human beings if they follow religious institutions, their ideology, and idols on a regular basis. They even believed pandemic as a wrath of God. People who were dead because of the virus were interpreted to be the ones who have sinned in their lives. Superstitious beliefs affirmed the country's health and people blatantly regarded whatever the political leaders instructed them to do without considering the sense of it. People struggled to survive and lost the love for one another rather, possessed opinionated self-egotism that distanced one from one another. Though people had fear of coping with it, many started getting accustomed to reality. Many of them made light out of the dark by strengthening their inner self, engaging in meaningful activities like gardening, playing sports, etc., men started cooking and helped with household chores. United as a family, they had each other backs at times of crisis. people started to understand and empathy their family members, what they go through by being physically present with them. They build strength together as one.

CONCEPTUALIZATION OF SPIRITUALITY AND ITS OVERLAP WITH RELIGIOSITY.

As mentioned earlier Spirituality is the love for one another, love for nature, and realizing one's purpose and meaning for their existence in addition to believing in some transcendental power. researchers define spirituality as "a broader and more comprehensive term than religion in that religion is more associated with institutional and organized belief systems"^[1]. Let us dive through religiosity to analogize it from spirituality. Religiosity is believing in power, an idea of a single being, and an eternal principle that has created the world and governs it. It has sets of practices and ritual which was approved by a group of members to be followed. Whereas Spirituality helps individuals to feel connected with the self and the community they live. It directs life to wholeness and encourages elevating the egotistical state of mind into an altruistic one. It motivates humans to be open to relationships with a penetrating power that has to be entrenched in society. Sharon Park, the author of the book "Big Questions, Worthy Dreams: Mentoring Young Adults in their search for Meaning, Purpose, and Faith". She states Spirituality as the faith that one possesses and religiosity to be a belief in something that is perceived to be true[God]^[2]. According to her, Faith enables the person to find meaning and make sense in the daily activities of life. Though religiosity and spirituality can be conceptualized differently, religiosity definitely contributes to develop spirituality. The day to day pious activities like praying in front of a Tulasi plant in the morning, attending online religious services, family prayers, making religious oblation, committing to tonsure with a request from God, etc. help them to survive the situation with hope and resilience which are some of the strengths of spirituality. Being religious, praying and performing rituals together help people to support each other and to develop their inner strength and stability.

THE VULNERABLE AND THE COURAGEOUS.

Unlike many other physiological health illnesses, Covid-19 attacked all humans despite their biological condition. From pregnant women and children who were considered to be the most vulnerable to a well-grown healthy man, everyone was prone to this virus attack. People who barged into solitary living were made

vulnerable irrespective of their gender. Many cases regarding domestic and intimate violence were recorded. Men, Women, and Children forcefully lived in a confined space developing hatred among themselves. Higher rates in pregnancy during pandemic shows women are vulnerable to men and their desire to have a healthy baby during the outbreak constantly messed up their mental health. People with Mental illnesses like substance use disorder indulged themselves in violent behaviors as they were deprived of the addictive substance due to lockdown. Proper treatment was not provided to them as treating the Covid-19 patients was of greater importance. The most vulnerable people were the immigrants and the homeless ones who suffered famine of food, finance, safety, health care. Though everyone at this time felt vulnerable few among them bloomed to be courageous enough to serve the ailing souls. From medical professionals to ambulance drivers and Dieners [mortuary attendees], everyone risked their lives to save others. Students and staff from various educational institutions joined hands together to provide appropriate tele-counseling to those who felt anxious and depressed with adequate guidance from the government. Also, common people who associated with many non-government organizations to serve those in need, should not be left unappreciated.

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN RESILIENCE BUILDING

Spirituality is perceived as a greater immunity during the pandemic. It is the awareness of one's true self. As discussed earlier, the courageous ones are the sole cause for the betterment of the people both mentally and physically. They are courageous mostly because they are spiritual and possess love for their neighbor. They portrayed altruistic behavior at times of crisis which healed millions of people. The selfless support offered by them shows how spiritual they are. Also, numerous studies have shown evidence that spirituality improves positivity and mental health (Andreas S. Papazoglou, 2021), (Verghese A,2008), (SINGER, 2021),(Singh NK, Ram D, Goyal N, Justin Raj PC ,2017). Spiritual practices like yoga, meditation, etc. enlighten and purify the soul both internally and externally, diminishing the feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and depression. It promotes acceptance of life and offers peace which is indispensable during a catastrophe like a Pandemic. People who are bereaved from the loss of their kindred ones process themselves through the grief cycle and suffer to accept the death of loved ones. Simple spiritual and pious practices heal them and help them to accept the loss and become peaceful. Spirituality also emphasizes the significance of social support and community living which is crucial during pandemic. (Dyson et al, 1997) suggested certain ways to inculcate a spiritual component in group activities for traumatic events in a patient's life. These group activities involve spiritual autobiography, discussion of silent prayer and meditation and attendance at religious services^[5]. Treating the patients as a whole, rather than focusing only on the biological model is considered essential. They believe social/physical distancing from others is the only way not to transmit the virus to their own family members and friends, and also helps them in self-introspection. What helps in the healing process of the diseased? Is money the only inspiration for medical professionals to risk their lives for the betterment of the nation? Definitely not! They had compassion for others, they believed in the spiritual dimension of selflessness. They were the spiritual warriors desperately working to heal people all around. Without spirituality, everyone would have been self-quarantined and died without defining the purpose and meaning of their lives. Without intervening in the spiritual domain, health cannot be restored and the patients cannot be treated holistically. The spiritual dimension enables us to be mindful and helps us with optimism to overcome any difficult situation.

THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY IN MENTAL HEALTH AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Spirituality plays an alpha role in providing holistic care to patients. Treating the psychological symptoms and the physical symptoms caused by it can be helpful temporarily but for the long run catering to their spiritual distress would necessarily heal them as a whole. In 1994 DSM-IV (Diagnostic State Manual) introduced a new V-Code titled “Religious and Spiritual problems” that required clinical attention and included two religious problems- distressing experiences that involve loss or questioning of faith and problems associated with the conversion of new faith^[8]. Social workers in a psychiatric setting could take this role to address the patient’s spiritual crisis. In the National Association of Social Workers(NASW) Code of Ethics, Competency standard 1.04 states. “Social Workers should provide services and represent themselves as competent only within the boundaries of their education, training, license, certification, consultation received supervised experience or other relevant professional experience. Social workers should provide services in substantive areas or use intervention techniques or approaches that are new to them only after engaging in appropriate study, training consultation, and supervision from people who are competent in those interventions and techniques^[9]. And so, the social workers with proper training should indulge themselves in spiritual counseling. The spirituality of a particular person is better understood with their cultural context.

ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS

- The social worker should make efforts to get a vivid understanding of their psychosocial spiritual perspectives and the people affected by pandemic.
- Through active listening social workers can help patients to ventilate themselves and help them in catharsis.
- They should converse with them about their beliefs and faith and engage them effectively to help them in opening up about their values and experiences without the fear of being judged.
- They should put a hold on their biases and intervene with an open mind. They should identify whether the patient’s belief system imposes anything on them and counsel them effectively.
- They should access the spiritual distress in patients by evaluating whether they feel hopeless, and help them to cope with the strengths of spirituality [hope, faith, resilience].
- Social workers can involve one of the methods of social work, “Group Work” and group them based on similar beliefs and values and group activities that accelerate their level of inner strengths.
- They can measure spirituality and emotional distress by using scales like the Spiritual Wellbeing Scale from WHO, to accurately mark their spiritual level and to probe them further.
- Social workers should also interpret whether their spirituality interferes with the decision-making process in the health care setting.
- Social workers can conduct group work activities to help them manage physical and emotional symptoms. For example, during the pandemic there was news, stating the patients in the COVID ward were engaged in playful activities which made them connect with one another and reduced their ailing symptoms. Being present for others and supporting each other with compassion and empathy bridged the gap of solitude and elevated the mental health of the patients.

CHALLENGES IN PRACTISING SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOUS INTERFERENCE

India is a secular country, but by and large, people are highly religious. Social work in the eastern perspective is far more different than the western perspective. We rely on religion, its symbols and idols, and ritual practices than focusing on inner strength, resilience, and grit. The level of spirituality cannot be quantified as each person's spiritual belief is subjective and unique based on their own life experiences. Therefore, the inadequacy in measuring spirituality is pertinent. Due to the dominance of ritualism and religious practices people may experience lots of hindrance and difficulties to focus on spirituality and build their inner strengths. The religious differences that prevail in the community restrict the patients to open up to social workers if they both belong to different religions. As both may experience discomfort, the real counseling and help that social workers may offer might remain a big challenge for them, unless they understand the dynamics of spirituality is building resilience. The predominant focus of spirituality is to highlight Love and service to others in need.

THE JOY OF GRATITUDE DURING PANDEMIC

Being grateful is an art and not everyone is an artist. But pandemic has taught us to feel the simple pleasure of being thankful for everything that is happening to us. Pandemic has helped us realize the importance of living our own lives meaningfully, without much worrying about all our future plans and wishful thinking. It made us realize life is more important than anything. It vanished our materialistic thoughts and engraved spiritualistic ideas to cope with the situation. People were content with what they had. Before pandemic we had the problem of assigning meaning to different materials forsaking our happiness, health care, passion, our contribution beyond ourselves. Owning a home, nice care, pieces of jewelry, planning a world tour were considered of great importance to living a happy content life. Pandemic has made people minimalists by letting them eliminate discontent thoughts and excess stuff, take care of their health, contribute to others, enjoy simplicity, discover life missions, identify purpose and people of their lives, survive with less consumption, and helped them to grow personally as great individuals. Many were aware of the importance of being present for others and loving them for who they are and not for what they have. We started to indulge in communal services to both family and society. As a family, we supported each other in all ways and strengthened the bond between us. As a community, we stood together in helping the needy. Through social media, many helped others by arranging hospital beds, oxygen cylinders, platelets and blood supplies, ambulance services, and many more. Gratitude is the greatest treasure that we all ignored once but now it has mainstreamed all along with our lives during pandemic. We learned the true meaning of gratitude and realized that it fulfills the emptiness of our discontented lives.

CONCLUSION

Spirituality is a highly cherished component that is always ignored in the medical setting. Medical professionals believe repairing the patients like machines and providing treatment would deliberately solve the cause of the problem, but humans are loaded with a lot of emotions to connect with each other and are social beings living in a community. Catering to all of this would contribute to better health in a long run. Especially during times of crisis like pandemic being present and empathizing with each other invariably helps everyone to cope with the crisis. Spirituality proclaims the sense of inter-connectedness, optimism,

reliance on faith, positive psychological adjustment, and communal service to the needy and sick. Spirituality may encompass religiosity as well but is not limited to it.

REFERENCE

1. Yeo Jin, A., & Miller, M. (2010). Can MFTs Address Spirituality with Clients in Publically Funded Agencies? *Contemporary Family Therapy: An International Journal*, 32(2), 102116. doi:10.1007/s10591-009-9107-5.
2. Parks, S. (2000). Big questions, worthy dreams: Mentoring young adults in their search for meaning, purpose, and faith. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
3. <https://characterclearinghouse.fsu.edu/article/differentiating-spirituality-religion>.
4. Chen Reis, L. L. (2020). Abused children and partners, people with mental illness are all especially vulnerable with stay-at-home orders from coronavirus. *The Conversation*.
5. Dyson J, Cobb M, Forman B. The meaning of spirituality: a literature review. *J Advan Nur* 1997;26:1183–88.
6. Maarten, A. S. (2020, April 7). The Spiritual Significance Of A Global Pandemic. South Africa Singh NK, Ram D, Goyal N, Justin Raj PC. Role of Spirituality in Mental Health Practice. *Indian J Psy Socl Work* 2017;8: 44-49.
7. American Psychiatric Association. Diagnostic and statistical Manual IV Text Review; 1994.
8. National Association of Social Workers (2012). Code of ethics of the national association of social workers. Retrieved from <http://www.socialworkers.org/pubs/code/code.asp>.
9. Verghese A. (2008). Spirituality and mental health. *Indian journal of psychiatry*, 50(4), 233–237. <https://doi.org/10.4103/0019-5545.44742>
10. Maarten, A. S. (2020, April 7). The Spiritual Significance Of A Global Pandemic. South Africa .