

Religion as Motivation in Social Work

An Honors Thesis (HONR 499)

by

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Abstract

Religion and spirituality are an important aspect of history. As will be stated in this document, religion and spirituality are involved in almost every part of history. Individuals who have religious and spiritual beliefs continuously strive to incorporate these into the workplace. Through the analysis of what religion and spirituality are, it will be explained how these tie into the workplace. The purpose of this analysis is to describe how social workers' view religion in their workplaces currently. This is compared to individual beliefs, generic workplaces, and workplaces that are similar to social work. In conclusion, the structure of social work education and training will be explained. I analyze these topics to increase knowledge and compare information about religion and spirituality in workplace situations especially social work.

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Introduction

In social work, studying each aspect of a client's life is necessary to understand the person as a whole individual. Social workers meet individuals when they are struggling through a difficult life situation. For this reason, it is important to understand a person for who they are and not the situation they are involved in. It can be impossible to understand why a client struggles with different situations without understanding every significant aspect of the client's life. One area often overlooked in social work curricula is the impact of religion and spirituality on a person's life (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). However, these topics have become increasingly more important throughout recent years. Emerging adults seem to be the age group that struggles most with these ideals due to the changes occurring in their life, and both religion and spirituality can impact the life of an individual in areas such as decision making and motivation to change (Arnett, 2015, p. 211). Thus, a social work practitioner must understand both the impact and the importance of religion or spirituality in the life of an individual. This is important for the growth of the client, but also for the well-being of the social worker (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). Understanding this importance will be necessary throughout the development of social work in the workplace.

Definitions

To discuss the impact of a particular phenomenon, it is necessary to fully understand definitions and terms. In some cases, like religion, individuals may use various words to describe the phenomenon each individual understands. This can be a personal definition for some individuals. Throughout research, various definitions have been used to describe the same word. This can be associated with the different perceptions each individual may have of the word. The two terms focused on in this section will be *religion* and *spirituality*. Though similar,

these terms have different meanings depending on the definitions presented. Generally, “spirituality has been described as concern with the ‘deeper, more mysterious part of our being’, as compared with religion, defined as an ‘institutionalized system of attitudes, beliefs and practices related to the service and worship of God or the supernatural’” (Cash & Gray, 2000, p. 126). This overview introduces religion and spirituality as understood within this paper.

Religion

Various definitions have been used to define religion. This is a well-known and universal term. However, as stated above, the term religion may mean different things to different people. Canda and Furman (1999) stated that religion “is commonly defined as ‘an institutionalized pattern of beliefs, behaviors and experiences, oriented toward spiritual concerns and shared by a community and transmitted over time in traditions’” (as cited in Rice & McAuliffe, 2009, p. 405). This definition focuses primarily on what individuals see through churches and similar establishments. Religion is a common gathering point for individuals to reflect on a spiritual focus in a community gathering. Traditions are often used in these situations to spread the spiritual focus. These traditions can allow individuals to understand the experiences of the community and of the spiritual focus in order to develop their beliefs and personal experiences as participation in religion continues.

It is important to note, however, that definitions can change throughout time. The definition in the above paragraph is from Canda and Furman in 1999. In 2010, Canda and Furman defined religion “as an institutionalized, systemic pattern of values, beliefs, symbols, behaviors, and experiences shared by community” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 271). Koenig (2008) adds “that relies on a set of scriptures, teachings, moral code of conduct, and rituals” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272) to the end of this definition.

Although these two definitions are similar, the second definition focuses more on the scheduled and planned institution of religion. Moreover, the addition by Koenig provides specific focuses of religion that can be used to practice religion. Definitions may change as times change. However, in the end, they may still share similar focuses.

Religion can provide different meanings for individuals depending on the context related. In relation to work, religion is defined by Clarence Walton (1988) as “a feeling for the transcendent, a spiritual identity, and a different way of viewing other human beings” (as cited in King, 2007, p. 103). This article further describes religion in a general context: “Religion is often understood as an institutional and organizational domain, confined and determined by creeds, theologies, and doctrines about man’s current and eternal destiny, his relationship with himself and others around him, and God (or some other transcendent or supreme being)” (King, 2007, p. 104). This definition is similar to the definition cited by Rice and McAuliffe in the above paragraph. Between these two, we see the commonality of an institution with guidelines defining it.

This same word can be defined in a broader way as well. King (2000) does this by stating that, “religion is a set of values, doctrines, and principles that provide an ethical and moral framework for understanding, motivation, and behavior” (as cited in King, 2007, p. 104). This definition could be in relation to an institution. However, it could also describe religion as a guideline individuals use for a deeper understanding of life. This definition focuses on the personal experiences individuals may gather from religion.

Some researchers have tried to define religion through scientific study, but these researchers have faced challenges in trying to define religion through this method. Researchers have found that “religion is based on faith, and therefore it is not subject to ‘the rigors of proof

necessary for scientific study” (King, 2007, p. 104). Thus, this type of research has proven to be difficult in a variety of locations (King, 2007). Through this definition, it is important to recognize that the idea of religion is completely constructed on faith. Therefore, this makes definition of religion difficult.

Spirituality

Spirituality is something some individuals may relate to religion. In some cases, this may be true. As stated above, a spiritual focus must be present as a focus for the religion. However, some individuals may view religion and spirituality as two different entities. As previously stated, religion and spirituality are personal experiences that may be perceived differently by each individual. Canda and Furman (1999), Cascio (1998), Derezotes (1995), and Sermabeileian (1994) state, “spirituality is often used to refer to one or all of the following notions: a search for a sense of meaning and purpose, beliefs about the functioning of the universe, a personal moral code, and a connection to a transcendent dimension outside or greater than the self” (as cited in Rice & McAuliffe, 2009, p. 405). Canda and Furman (2010) also add that “spirituality is a fundamental human quality” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272). Pargament (2007) adds to this definition: “that involves a personal search for the sacred” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272), and Miller (2003) concludes with a statement from Summit on Spirituality: ““moves the individual toward knowledge, love, meaning, peace, hope, transcendence, connectedness, compassion, wellness, and wholeness”” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272). These definitions include a variety of focuses that keep them broad. Due to the nature of spirituality being a personal journey, definitions need to be broad in order to encompass a variety of ideas.

Spirituality may also be titled differently based on the focus for the specific range of practices and beliefs. Crowther, Parker, Achenbaum, Larimore, and Koenig (2002) describe positive spirituality as ““a developing and internalized personal relation with the sacred or transcendent that is not bound by race, ethnicity, economics, or class and promotes the wellness and welfare of self and others”” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272). This definition helps individuals to relate spirituality to all aspects of life regardless of who they are. Moreover, it highlights the freedom of each individual to live their own personal journey through spirituality.

The focus of spirituality is usually less structured than the idea of religion. This can be seen in the definition cited in Rice and McAuliffe above. This idea is supported further by King (2007) who states that ““spirituality is a ‘search for the sacred, a process or journey by which the individual examines life, its meaning and purpose, and the overall effect that one has on others and the environment, including the organization”” (p. 105). In terms of spirituality and the workplace ““the existential perspective of workplace spirituality refers to an individual’s search to find meaning in life and in the workplace”” (Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 380). In this way, spirituality is used to help an individual discover and follow their purpose in life.

Likewise, Krishnakumar and Neck (2002) state that ““spirituality implies an inner search for meaningfulness and fulfilment as well as a feeling of connectedness with others, which search may be embarked upon by anyone, regardless of religion”” (as cited in Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 380). This definition focuses on the uniqueness spirituality provides and is supported by Milliman et al. (2003) who state that ““workplace spirituality implies a connection or a relationship with others, which includes, inter alia, a deeper connection with people, support, freedom of expression, and genuine care”” (as cited in Van Der Walt & Der Klerk, 2014, p. 380).

These particular definitions focus on the connectedness of people and how spirituality can assist in this connection.

Cash and Gray (2000) work to define spirituality as well and further address the difficulty in defining it:

Some authors have defined spirituality using such terms as energy, meaning, and knowing, and have relied heavily on Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, Zen, and Native American traditions to describe concepts that integrate all aspects of a person's life from work to leisure. Others list such examples of spirituality as existentialism (individual freedom and responsibility with an absence of supernatural authority), new age, guided meditation techniques, imaging, visioning, relaxation, and focusing. Other practices in spirituality focus on ecology and avenues for becoming more spirituality attuned to the environment and more concerned for the Earth and all its species (p. 126).

This definition allows readers to focus on various types of practices that are considered to be spirituality-based.

As demonstrated in the various definitions identified, spirituality can be difficult to identify, and "there is no universally accepted definition of spirituality" (King, 2007, p. 105). Each individual can have an independent understanding of what spirituality means.

Summary of Definitions

The definitions identified above will be used throughout the paper because they encompass a broad definition of each word. However, these definitions do not limit the reader from developing their own ideas of religion and spirituality. The definitions are meant to allow for a common understanding but should not prohibit anyone from having their own personal views of each term. In summary, religion and spirituality have been identified by Hill (2000) as

“feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from the search for the sacred” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 271). This definition combines both ideas in a broad idea that is open to the perceptions each individual may have of religion and spirituality. In addition to examining individual perceptions of religion and spirituality, this paper will also investigate the interaction of religion and spirituality within the work-place and, more specifically, social work.

Role of Religion and Spirituality

Individual

The influence of religion and spirituality can be seen in the lives of everyday individuals through different beliefs and views. Even those individuals who do not hold a religion or spiritual belief may be influenced by what they believe in. This may be nature or conscience influencing morals or values for individuals who do not have a religion or spirituality. Each individual has a unique view on their own religion or spirituality. Howard (2002) states, “regardless of the worldview or definition of spirituality, organizational theorists observe that ‘whatever one’s underlying belief system, everyone has a spiritual life, just as they have an unconscious, whether they like it or not’” (as cited in Bygrave & MacMillan, 2008, p. 98). This allows readers to understand that regardless of how an individual defines religion or spirituality, there is always something people inherently believe in no matter how they define it. These beliefs allow them to develop throughout their lifetime.

As an individual matures and begins to develop themselves, they may choose a religion or spiritual organization that matches their viewpoints and experiences. This phenomenon is reinforced by the statement, “forming religious beliefs appears to be a universal part of identity development” (Arnett, 2015, p. 211). This has been seen mostly in emerging adults. As an

individual is identifying, they may be influenced by experiences or other factors that allow them to find a religious or spiritual belief. The beliefs can be taken into various sections of an individual's life, such as work, school, and personal life events. By one account, "people's sense of spirituality when they enter the world of work is an intrinsic element of their being, evolved and shaped through years of experience and exposure to their environment, and made explicit through their behavior" (Geroy, 2005, p. 67). This part of an individual has been built upon the lifestyle and experiences they have had throughout their life. When bringing religion or spirituality to other situations, it is something that is already a part of them. For this reason, religion and spirituality may assist the individual in conflicts and decisions. These beliefs allow individuals to address and answer questions in everyday lives. In most cases, adults will focus their morals and values off of their religious or spiritual beliefs. For this reason, it is stated that "beliefs and values are often connected" (Arnett, 2015, p. 211). Individuals focusing on their identity may turn to religion or spiritual beliefs in order to discover their values and morals or define them.

Morals and values guide individuals throughout the choices in their lives. For emerging adults, these are large life decisions. In connection to religion or spirituality and values, it is important to view all aspects. According to Cash and Gray (2000):

For people of religious faith, separating their faith from their moral values might well be impossible. For other individuals, their sincere and meaningful beliefs may be rooted in value systems or in a spirituality based upon something other than formal mainstream religions. (p. 127)

Individuals look to different factors in their environment to influence the values they hold.

Individuals allow "influence of family and peers and interactions with mandated and chosen

social structures and systems” to guide their interactions in the environments they enter (Geroy, 2005, p. 67). Thus, it is difficult for an individual to separate their religion or spirituality from themselves if these things are and have been a major deciding factor in their lives.

As stated previously, emerging adults may be the individuals in which religion or spirituality are commonly identified. Emerging adults may display involvement in religion and spirituality due to the powerful impact it has in everyday life (Arnett, 2015, p. 211). This does not mean emerging adults are more religious or spiritual. However, throughout discussions, religion and spirituality may be prominently witnessed in emerging adults due to their identity development (Arnett, 2015, p. 211). Religion and spirituality can be seen in this age group both with individuals that identify with these beliefs and with those who do not. Even if an individual does not have a particular religion or spiritual belief, the process to reach this conclusion is a part of the self-identifying development (Bygrave & MacMillan, 2008, p. 98).

A longitudinal study conducted by the National Study on Youth and Religion (NSYR) consisted of a national sample of individuals 13 to 17 years (Arnett, 2015). The purpose of this study was to determine the changes individuals undergo from adolescence into emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2015).

Looking at each individual group of emerging adults is helpful when describing belief systems. Those with agnostic and atheistic beliefs make up 40% of emerging adults studied:

Emerging adults who do not believe in God (atheists) or who believe it is not possible to know if there is a God or not (agnostics), along with emerging adults who say they have no opinion or religion or do not think about it. Some are strongly anti-religious, but to most young people in this category, religion is simply irrelevant to their lives. (Arnett, 2015, p. 213)

This group defines those who both have searched and identified as atheist or agnostic or those who have no opinion on these beliefs. Either way, religion and spirituality have a role in both agnostic and atheist individuals because they are identifying as each of these descriptions. These beliefs are “that there is no soul, that there are no supernatural beings, and that we have no destiny after death is to address religious questions and include the answers in a worldview” (Arnett, 2015, p. 211). This quote concludes that all individuals who either define with a religion or spirituality or against still take the time in order to identify. These questions are brought into each individual’s life as they mature from adolescence to emerging adults.

Focusing on the information above, it is important to understand that 40% of individuals identify as having no religion or spiritual belief or as having no clear view of these. By this statistic, it is clear that religion and spirituality may not be important to emerging adults as it has been in the past: “religion is less important to today’s emerging adults than it was in the past, and less relevant to their lives. Still, nearly half of American emerging adults say that their religious faith is ‘very important’ to them” (Arnett, 2015, p. 222). The PEW Forum on Religion and Public Life (2012) reports similar results for adults by stating, “80 percent of U.S. adults view religion as being at least *somewhat* important (58 percent view it as *very* important” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272). This information allows readers to understand that even though the importance may have declined in emerging adults recent years, some individuals are still using religion to make important decisions. The slightly higher level of adults who view religion as “very important” may be significant to follow in the future. This importance is reflected as “while 90 percent of the U.S. population is Christian, there are growing numbers of Islamic, Buddhist, and Hindu Americans, and Islam may soon supplant Judaism as the second largest faith” (Cash & Gray, 2000, p. 125). Emerging adults as a majority may be passive about

focusing on religion or spirituality, but nearly half of those surveyed still view them as being important aspects of life.

Individuals often come to religious and spiritual beliefs through a personal journey. Whether the individual was raised with a particular belief or not, they may still chose to take a personal journey to find a different religion or spirituality or confirm the belief system in which they were raised. In general, most emerging adults are searching to develop an identity that is their own. According to Arnett (2015), “even the fifteen percent of emerging adults who are religious conservatives have come to those beliefs through their personal process of questioning and searching” (p. 242). Emerging adults want to find an identity that is their own. When it comes to religion or spirituality, this may mean moving away from what they were raised with and finding something that fits their experiences better. Overall, this journey is often taken alone and is often used to develop morals and values.

Workplace

As stated above, religion and spirituality are essential components of one’s individual composition. Religion and spirituality can guide an individual through decisions. However, this is a concept that is often avoided in a workplace setting, and many workplaces ask their employees to not discuss religious or spiritual in the workplace. However, religion and spirituality can be useful for individuals in the workplace as it is so engrained into a person’s life. Kolodinsky et al. (2004) explains that “on a personal level, spirituality is viewed as the application of an individual’s personal spirituality to the working environment (as cited in Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 380). The environment around a person is what a person focuses their spirituality on. Therefore, for a working individual, it is important to view this connection

within the workplace. By ignoring these important aspects, it may be possible employees are feeling restricted.

An article titled "The Role of Religiosity in Stress, Job Attitudes, and Organizational Citizenship Behavior" discusses religion and spirituality in the workplace, citing Kosmin et al. (2001) and Conlin (1999) who state, "with almost 95% of Americans stating they believe there is a God, and 81% of American adults indicating a specific religious affiliation religion is not something employers can realistically expect employees to "leave at the door" when they come to work (as cited in Kutcher, Bragger, Rodriguez-Srednicki, & Masco, 2010, p. 319). For this reason, asking someone to ignore this portion of their life for eight hours every day may not be realistic. As stated by Gibson (2005), individuals are becoming more involved in religion or spirituality, and for this reason, more individuals desire this to be a part of all aspects of their lives (as cited in Kutcher et al., 2010). This focus for a deeper involvement in everyday life is causing the barrier between what is expected in the workplace to -become a gray area. However, some organizations are becoming more lenient on the expression of religion in the workplace, and this can be "explained by the many positive consequences that are found to accompany religious beliefs and practices" (Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 319). As more employers are seeing the benefits of religious and spiritual expression in the workplace, the divide between religion and workplaces may start to diminish.

In relation to culture, Cash and Gray (2000) believe religion or spirituality may be an important expression of an individual's culture (as cited in Kutcher et al., 2010). This current society is focused on allowing all people to express their beliefs and cultures openly. Sometimes, workplaces define how this should be done in order to avoid offending others, as it is still expected that each person should be able to express themselves in an open and respectful

way. Individually, it has been noted that religion and spirituality “can be integral to many clients’ lives and are important to consider in social work practice, much like culture” (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272). Thus, religion and spirituality are as important as focusing on culture in order to serve clients in all aspects of their lives. In one case, religion or spirituality and culture share commonalities in definitions: “In fact, Canda and Furman (2010) defined religion, and Robbins, Chatterjee, and Canda (2012) defined culture as both being shared by a community or social group, transmitted over time, and including a pattern of values, beliefs, and behaviors” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 272). Studies have shown that an open environment for faith may allow for “better attitudes, stress coping practices, and collective work ethic” (Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 319). These positive changes that have been displayed may be a factor in why more employers are choosing to have more open work environments.

Several studies have been completed to understand the connections between religiosity and the attitude in the workplace. The first study conducted by “Sikorska-Simmons (2005) studied staff members in an assisted living organization, and found a positive relationship between religiosity and job satisfaction, and between religiosity and organizational commitment” (as cited in Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 321). These results reveal a positive connection between career success and individual beliefs. It is important to focus on what job satisfaction means in relation to these studies. Locke (1976) states, “job satisfaction will be regarded as ‘a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting for the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences’” (as cited in Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 381). A second study conducted by “Jamal and Badawi (1993) found that religiosity moderated the relationship between job stressors and job motivation, job satisfaction, organizational commitment and turnover motivation” (as cited in Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 321). From this study, it is found that individuals are more likely to be

committed to keeping a job and have higher satisfaction rates depending upon their level of religiosity. Neal (2000) supports this finding by stating, “ironically, some research indicates that engaging the spirit of employees enhances the meaning of work, increases commitment and productivity, and deepens relationships in the workplace” (as cited in Bygrave & MacMillan, 2008, p. 97). Others have seen positive outcomes through the work individuals complete in the workplace. Nasina and Doris (2011) explain that “if employees are at liberty to bring their physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual attributes to the workplace, they will become more productive, creative and fulfilled” (as cited in Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 379). These benefits are most important to the employers as they improve the work completed by the employees. The final study by Harpaz (1998) stated that “religious individuals scored higher on work centrality, indicating that work held a more central role in the lives of religious individuals” (as cited in Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 321). All of these studies indicate an association between religion or spirituality and positive attitudes in the workplace.

Regardless of these findings, it may be difficult for employers to understand why they should allow religion and spirituality in the workplace. King (2007) writes that:

For public employers to recognize and accept religious expression in the workplace, it must be understood outside its traditional institutionalized context. Religion in the workplace, in other words, is not so much modeled after the orthodoxy of the past but after the freedom of the present (p.104).

The idea of formalized religion and spirituality is changing. This can be explained through the above quote but it is also clear in the variety of definitions of religion and spirituality available in this paper. This diversity should be noted by employers in order to respect all represented groups. Indeed, “one aspect of this growing diversity has been the dramatic increase in the

various types of formal and informal religious and spiritual expression practiced by members of the workforce” (Cash & Gray, 2000, p. 124), which has changed the overall view of representation in the workforce. Cash and Gray (2000) emphasize “while in the main focus of religious concern in the workplace has been formal religion, there is a growing emphasis on the practice of spirituality or other forms of informal religion” (p. 126). This emphasis reflects the changes that have occurred throughout time in and out of the workplace. By allowing individuals to express each type of formal or informal religious or spiritual identity they possess, workplaces are diversified.

However, some individuals have reported that they have negative feelings about the involvement of religion or spirituality in their work life. Studies by Knotts (2003) and Strümpfer (1997) show “that intrinsically religious-oriented individuals were less satisfied with their jobs, and extrinsically religious people had higher job involvement” (Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 321-322). Thus, intrinsically religious individuals may be more focused on their religious affiliations than their employment due to the disagreements individuals who are deeply connected with their religion may encounter in the workplace. For example, “most organizations are for-profit ventures and many hold the ‘value’ of making a profit to be their highest goal” (Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 322). For an individual who is focused on their faith above worldly things, this may be a difficult concept to accept and may make these individuals uncomfortable in their workplace. According to Kutcher et al. (2010), “intrinsically religious individuals working in environments they perceive to be violating their belief systems may have reduced satisfaction or involvement in the organization” (p. 322). If an individual feels as if their beliefs are not respected, the individual may feel restricted and uncomfortable. Cal Thomas (1997) supports this idea by noting “a blurring between religion and one’s external environment by asserting that ‘all of life is

religious-economic, relational, political” (as cited in Cash & Gray, 2000, p. 125). This explanation allows readers to better understand what may be occurring for intrinsically religious individuals in the workplace. However, this is just an assumption of what could be occurring. Other factors may be involved.

On the other hand, individuals may feel and be more productive with the influence of religion or spirituality. Satisfaction and commitment to the workplace may also increase with this influence and may be explained as “when placing faith in God and surrendering to a higher power, the individual relieves himself from the burden of worrying over issues that are out of his control” (Kutcher et al., 2010, p. 331). Indeed, many benefits have been resulted from religion in the workplace. With several noted benefits, it may be confusing why more workplaces do not discuss religion in the workplace. Geroy (2005) describes one benefit as “the reflection of spirituality as a sense of meaning and interconnectedness, the development of the whole person, and a sense of community in the workplace advance the question, ‘What opportunities exist for individual to initiate self-managed spiritual development within the context of organizational performance-managed spirituality?’” (p. 72). Each person brings their spirituality into the workplace and into each interaction. However, employees are given few or no chances to increase the involvement of spirituality in the workplace.

Though it may be difficult for employers to understand how to incorporate religion and spirituality into the workplace, studies have found that “when an organization was perceived to have incorporated spiritual values into their ethos and was actively promoting workplace spirituality, there is a significant difference compared to an organization that was perceived not to have incorporated spirituality on the organizational level” (Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 382). Employees with religious and spiritual backgrounds are not asking employers to make

the workplace a spiritual place, but to allow individuals to experience their faith in the workplace (Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014). This is supported by Kolodinsky et al. (2004, 2008) as “in the organizational definition of workplace spirituality, the focus is on the spiritual nature of the organization itself rather than the individual” (as cited in Van Der Walt & De Klerk, 2014, p. 381). The benefits may not be enough if individuals do not feel like they are being given opportunity to increase their spirituality on a daily basis.

Negative feelings

Individuals have expressed reasons why they are not satisfied with religion or spirituality in the workplace. Rhodes (2003) explains this by stating, “For some, however, religion is to be confined to an individual’s private life, not to be imposed on the public organization (King, 2007, p. 104). This practice describes why individuals may want religion to be practiced in private. As stated above, religion is viewed as an institution and is often thought to take place in a building. People may be opposed to religion in the workplace for this reason. Spirituality may be allowed in the workplace for some people due to the variances in definitions. Indeed, “advocates of spirituality in the work environment often view spirituality and religion as very different concepts; while they generally oppose the promotion of formal religion in the workplace, they openly defend spirituality as a workplace practice” (Cash & Gray, 2000, p. 126). This explains why some individuals may be more open to spirituality in the workplace than religion. Due to the individuality of spirituality, individuals may be more open to the practice of this in a work environment.

Social Work Profession

Individuals tend to take their personal beliefs with them into their work. Their work may not support the same beliefs as the individual. In these cases, it is important for each individual

to recognize their beliefs in relation to the morals and values they hold. This is important as an individual often makes important decisions through the consultation of their belief system.

Values are often based upon the beliefs the individual holds and will be a major factor in decision making. According to Arnett (2015), “your values come into play when you have a decision to make and you have to ask yourself, what is really most important to me?” (p. 236). This could lead to ethical dilemmas between the individual’s personal values and the values they must hold as a professional. Social workers, in particular, encounter many ethical dilemmas in their workplaces.

Within the social work profession, it is important for the social worker to know their personal beliefs. In certain situations, a social worker with a religious or spiritual identity may encounter a client who carries values that differ from their own. This could be difficult for any professional to handle. However, a social worker is dealing with uniquely personal topics that may not align with their own belief systems. This may be important to recognize in order to allow the social worker to appropriately communicate with their clients. However, this may be difficult without proper training or guidance.

Importance of religion and spirituality

Some social work organizations are faith based. A social worker may work directly in these agencies or refer individuals to these organizations. For this reason, it will be necessary for social workers to have a basic understanding of faith-based organizations. It is important for social workers to understand these in case a client they are working with is heavily influenced by religion or spirituality. This involvement could assist the client in overcoming their situation. Understanding the role of religion and spirituality in individuals, as examined earlier, can assist social workers in connecting individuals with organizations who share similar views.

However, this is something that several authors believe social service providers are lacking. It has been stated that “the role of religious organizations in social service provision is little understood and requires serious critical review” (Reisch & Gambrill, 1997, p. 272). The importance of religion and spirituality on a personal and historical level is often disregarded from social work education programs, and Reisch and Gambrill argue that “the role of religious congregations and denominations in social service provision has been consistently downplayed in the social work literature over the past 30 years, except in religiously affiliated schools of social work” (p. 272). This lack of knowledge may lead to professional incompetency in regards to religion and is something that could be improved by a greater focus on religion in social work education. This view may be necessary to understand in order to view how often clients turn to religion or spirituality. Through these organizations, individuals may feel a connectedness that they are unable to find through other outlets, as these organizations may provide the motivations and direction for change that were currently unavailable to them. For these individuals, it is necessary for service providers to be competent about clients’ religious and spiritual needs.

Reisch and Gambrill (1997) believe:

that based on the enormous welfare provision by religious congregations and denominations and current social and political climate in the United States, serving people in need will depend on a full and mutual alliance between social work and religiously based social services (p. 272).

For this reason, it is necessary for service providers to be given information about religion and spirituality in social work in order to serve clients fully. In working with faith-based organizations, social workers can be provided with a variety of options for their clients. Social workers see a diverse group of individuals with varying social problems. Therefore, it is

important to increase knowledge in a variety of areas in order to become competent and serve each client to the best of their ability.

History of religious and spiritual social service organizations

In order to fully understand the role of faith-based organizations, it is necessary to understand the ties these organizations have to social work. Some organizations seem to forget or disregard the historic significance of religion and spirituality in social work. This can be dangerous due to the fact that “this separation of social work from its roots not only jeopardizes its moral- foundation and public support basis, but also makes it difficult for the profession to chart its future course” (Reisch & Gambrill, 1997, p. 272). This quote emphasizes that ignoring the origin of social work may be dangerous for the future. Thus, it is important to increase knowledge of the history of religion and spirituality in social work.

Religion and spirituality have strong ties to the foundation of social work as a profession. This can be seen when examining how social work was founded. As stated by Loewenberg (1995) and Hinson (1988), “provisions of services to the poor, orphan and widows, sick and disabled, prisoners and captives, travelers, and to neighbors in times of calamities was both emphasized and fostered in the early Jewish and Christian traditions” (as cited in Reisch & Gambrill, 1997, p. 274). These doctrine have been established and acted on since the fourth century (Reisch & Gambrill, 1997). These basic understandings allowed for individuals to serve those they saw to be in need. Social work was not a profession at this point, but an action individuals did based on the religious beliefs they upheld. Throughout the years, pastors and other religious leaders have focused on the point of serving others as Jesus would do. One pastor stated this by saying, “such actions must extend to all aspects of life and link voluntary service and personal philanthropy as a means of doing God’s will” (Reisch & Gambrill, 1997, p. 274).

Through this sermon, he calls individuals to serve others as a daily need. All aspects of life could include work, school, and family, and this call to service is a prevalent ideology in most religions. Social work is formed through this ideology. History shows that “in premodern periods in the United States (such as those characterizing colonial and early American history) social welfare was provided mostly by religious organizations alone or in partnership with secular agents” (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013, p. 443). This changed throughout modern ages. Trattner (1999) explains, “Eventually, the modern state took the lead in providing social welfare” (as cited in Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013, p. 443). This change in leadership of social welfare organizations has been seen to this day. For most organizations, religion and spirituality are served by particular organizations only. Finding organizations that serve specific religious or spiritual identities may be important for modern day social workers to know in order to effectively refer clients.

In the United States, religion has been highly prevalent in social service organizations. Reisch and Gambrill (1997) state that “for over 250 years, nearly all organized social services in the United States were religiously based” (1997, p. 275). This information shows how involved religion and spirituality have been in serving individuals who are experiencing social problems. These organizations have worked to provide healing and change in the lives of individuals by having a focus of faith in their practice. Some faith-based organizations may be open to all individuals regardless of religion or spiritual affiliation.

Although this paper focuses on religion and spirituality and social work in the United States missionaries and other travelers have been able to spread religion or spirituality internationally while also providing basic need such as healthcare and other services (Reisch & Gambrill, 1997). These organizations have been in action for centuries as noted earlier in this

section. Other organizations have been known to follow the structure of faith-based organizations. Some researchers have stated that they believe this practice should continue: "it will take some careful ideological compromises and bold leadership, but these religiously based social services are our historical as well as future allies" (Reisch & Gambrill, 1997, p. 272). For these reasons, the rich history of faith-based organizations has allowed for social work to develop to what it is today.

It is important to note what has occurred in the recent history of social work. Changes have occurred in the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) Code of Ethics over the years. In the recent release of the NASW Code of Ethics (2008), the section discussing cultural competency includes religion (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Recent President George W. Bush also made a statement in relation to religion and social services. During his campaign, he upheld the belief that "religious institutions in the United States have traditionally delivered social services to disadvantaged groups, and during his campaign he pledged to increase the involvement of faith-based organizations in social service provision" (Ebaugh, Pipes, Chafetz, & Daniels, 2003, p. 411). These changes have not necessarily made the prevalence of religion in social work practice more prevalent. However, it is interesting to see that individuals are addressing the needs for social services to incorporate religion and spirituality. Even though change does not occur quickly, awareness is necessary to allow individuals to begin to seek the means to change. This is a skill that needs to be taught, as will be noted later. However, it is important to know and understand that social workers should be culturally competent of religious beliefs in order to appropriately serve clients.

Integration of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work

Education

Social work programs are often lacking information about religion and spirituality in practice settings. Social workers are rarely taught how to interact with clients who have religious or spiritual backgrounds. For this reason, the knowledge and information social workers have may not be as specific as it should be. This may lead to a separation between social workers and the clients they are serving. Canda and Furman (2010) provide statistics such as “65 percent of social workers report not having received education on how to integrate clients’ religion and spirituality in practice, and 25 percent do not have the skills to assist clients in these matters” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Canda and Furman (2010), Crook-Lyon et al. (2012), and Prest et al. (1999) also note “a common thread across professions, with practitioners desiring more discussion of religion and spirituality in their training” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). This lack of confidence in skill may lead to clients not feeling as though they are receiving the care they need or deserve, which could be disheartening to a client who is already facing social problems. Additionally, religion and spirituality can be something that individuals heavily lean on in times of stress. If social workers cannot appropriately include religion and spirituality within a client’s intervention plan, the client may be distraught and lose trust in the social worker’s ability.

The importance of religious and spiritual education within the social work department is important for clients, but also necessary for the social workers who identify as being religious or spiritual. As stated earlier, religion and spirituality can have a role in every aspect of an individual’s life, and it can be difficult for individuals to separate work from religion and spirituality. Rice (2005) states “the recognition of the importance of religion and spirituality in some social workers’ lives has given rise to questions about what impact these belief and value systems might have on their social work practice” (as cited in Rice & McAuliffe, 2009, p. 404).

This is important for social work students to consider as they go through a social work education program. Most will bring their religious and spiritual lives into the classroom with them. Therefore, it is necessary to examine what is occurring in social work curricula.

In some programs, the idea of incorporating religion and spirituality into the curriculum is not viewed as important, and negative consequences can occur for students who have religious or spiritual beliefs in these situations. Thyer and Myers (2009) explain “it is important to examine how religion and spirituality interfaces with social work education, especially because some students have reported experiences- of religious discrimination in the classroom” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 273). The feelings of discrimination may allow students to feel the need to withdrawal and hold in important comments they may normally express. This may in turn affect their learning and the overall environment of the room. Social workers who wish to work directly with religion and spirituality may feel that they lack the appropriate skills to interact with clients in this way. For these reasons, it is important for social work departments to be aware of these situations they may be affecting the lives of social workers and clients as social workers may feel restricted when it comes to religion and spirituality.

When looking at social work education in relation to religion and spirituality, it is necessary to learn where individuals believe they are lacking information. Social workers want to be competent enough to serve clients to the fullest. For this reason, it is important for social work professors to understand what is happening in their classrooms. If social work majors do not believe they are receiving the information they require, they may become despondent and uninterested in their career. As social workers, the goal is to serve individuals and communities and advocate for people experiencing social problems. However, if social work students do not feel like they are personally being advocated for due to religious or spiritual discrimination, they

may become reserved from the major and the program as a whole. Therefore, it is important for programs to be open about the feelings individuals may be having about social work and religion or spirituality. Thus, "it is important for the social work profession to understand social workers' views and behaviors around integrating religion and spirituality in practice to inform future training and educational efforts" (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 277). This statement shows the value in knowing what social workers are thinking in regards to religion and spirituality. Discussions about religion and spirituality in the curriculum should be held openly in classrooms. These discussions should occur in relation to students who believe religion and spirituality should be included and for those who believe it should not. Having these open discussions may encourage students to feel more comfortable and confident about their belief system in relation to social work. The negative consequences of these topics being ignored is explained by Canda and Furman (2010): "Although a growing discourse is apparent- in social work literature, the profession has much to learn about integrating clients' religion and spirituality, especially because most social work practitioners have not received education on this topic" (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). Oxhandler and Pargament (2014) add to this statement by asserting that some social workers may be unclear how to handle situations in which they must serve majority religious individuals due to the lack of education and knowledge they have received. These conversations may lead to social workers and clients to feeling more comfortable about religion and spirituality in social work.

Interventions using religion and spirituality

The curriculum for some social work programs may need to be updated as seen above. There are several interventions that can be utilized by clients that are focused around religion and spirituality. Social workers must be informed on what these programs are and how to access

them in order to appropriately refer their clients to these services. In this section, I will focus on what types of interventions are available. This should begin to provide insight for social workers as they work to learn and become culturally competent in the services offered to individuals with religious or spiritual influences.

It may be unclear why an individual would want to access a practice that has an influence of religion and spirituality. However, many individuals turn to religion and spirituality in times of stress, and most social work clients are seeing a social worker because they have reached a point in their lives where a social problem has consumed their lives. At this point, they have turned to religion or spirituality and social work in order to overcome the social problem that has dictated their life. Interventions with religion and spirituality have been shown to provide hope to these clients. Koenig, King, and Carson (2012) and Koenig, McCullough, and Larson (2001) note “a growing body of evidence on spirituality, religion, and health suggests religious or spiritual practices contribute to positive outcomes across a wide range of health and mental health issues” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 271). This evidence shows how the positive outcomes of these practices may be beneficial to a client who is distressed. Overwhelming situations can cause individuals to become disheartened and hopeless. However, as this evidence states, religious and spiritual practices may allow individuals to experience positive outcomes in regards to a variety of situations.

Spiritually focused interventions are described by Rice and McAuliffe (2009) as “those practice responses or ways of working that practitioners believe -have been informed -or adapted from religious or spiritual practices or ideas, or else are considered to directly engage with the religious or spiritual aspect of a client’s life” (p. 404).

These practices may not specifically involve spirituality. However, the basis of these practices stems directly from spirituality. In some cases, these practices may directly involve spirituality in the process of helping the individual through their social problem. These activities can involve various different practices. Some are explained as “everything from energetic body work to discussing and sharing religious and spiritual beliefs with clients” (Rice & McAuliffe, 2009, p. 404). The variance in these activities can help to appeal to all individuals. If someone is seeking religious or spiritual guidance through dealing with a social problem, they would have a wide variety of choices. Rice and McAuliffe (2009) specifically refer to:

recommending or using religious/spiritual writings, concepts, or language with clients;
participating in a client’s religious/spiritual ritual; touching clients for healing purposes;
praying for/with clients; discussing spiritual/religious beliefs and support systems, life after death, and the meaning of dreams with clients. (p. 406-407)

These may be important practices that could be beneficial to clients during their time of need. However, some social workers may not be open to leading clients in these types of activities because most relate to specific religions or spiritualities. For those who are open to these practices, it may be necessary for special training to take place. As stated earlier, these are rarely discussed within the social work curriculum. In a social work career, these topics are generally considered to be off limits unless a client brings it up.

As noted, there is a wide variety of options for individuals who wish to experience a practice with a focus or influence of religion or spirituality. However, it has been seen that these are often underutilized. One study reports, “there is a clear trend towards a higher degree of ethical acceptance or considered appropriateness of the interventions than there was actual usage of these in practice situations” (Rice & McAuliffe, 2009, p. 416). This displays a greater

openness to the idea of these interventions. However, there is still a wide range of growth available. The lack of utilization may be explained by the lack of information regarding the benefits. Larsen (2010), Mattison et al. (2000), Sheridan (2004), Stewart, Koeske, & Koeske (2006) argue that “more religious or older practitioners are more likely to consider religious activities to be appropriate for use in practice, hold positive attitudes toward religion and spirituality, and make greater use of interventions that integrate -clients’ religion and spirituality in practice” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). If social workers are provided more information and skills regarding these activities, younger practitioners who are not religious may be more willing to incorporate these activities into their clients’ intervention plans. Therefore, as social workers become more aware of the influence of religion and spirituality in the lives of individuals, these may increase.

To become further culturally competent, it may be necessary for discussions to take place in regards to these activities. Knowing that these practices exist and can be utilized would be helpful for social workers to be aware of. Even if social workers are uncomfortable performing these practices or activities, it is still important and necessary for them to be informed. Many clients will wait for their social worker to mention religion or spirituality. Clients may feel uncomfortable bringing up this topic no matter how important it may be to them. Koenig (2005), Stanley et al. (2011), Tepper, Rogers, Coleman, and Maloney (2001) note that “clients have also expressed -a preference -for health care providers to initiate the discussion of their religious -and spiritual beliefs, stating such integration supports their healing process (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 271). Social workers should then find a way to address religion and spirituality in a way that allows individuals to guide their intervention. Additionally, “there appears to be a need to empower practitioners to ethically and effectively assess for and address

any issues related to religion and spirituality in practice” (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 277). It is important for social workers to know where they personally stand on the topic of religion and spirituality. Even if they do not believe in either of these, they may still need to be able to discuss these with a client. In short, “because clients prefer to discuss their religious and spiritual beliefs at their practitioner’s initiative, social workers’ views and integration of religion and spirituality into practice are worth exploring” (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 274). Being self-aware is extremely important in relation to religion and spirituality for social workers due to the importance it could hold for clients, and social workers must be culturally competent and serve their clients to the best of their abilities.

Faith-based organizations

One specific way social workers incorporate religion and spirituality into what they do is by interacting within and with faith-based organizations. Like most social service agencies, these organizations have evolved over the years in order to effectively meet the needs of the growing and changing modern society (Bielefeld & Cleveland, 2013). A faith-based organization is an organization or service that is based upon, connected to, or supported by a particular religion or spirituality (Dictionary.com, 2016). Faith-based organizations can vary in the amount of religion and spirituality they incorporate into the services they offer (Ebaugh et al., 2003). Nathan and Wright (2003) discuss the approach that can be taken by faith-based organizations to allow for attention and livelihood to individuals looking for religious and spiritual needs to be met (as cited in Clerkin & Grønbjerg, 2007). These organizations may be able to effect changes in the way religion and spirituality are regarded today. Faith-based organizations are a major way that social workers desiring to work with clients seeking help in religious and spiritual matters can have these connections. Although more research needs to be

done to see the benefits, faith-based organizations are allowing religion and spirituality be openly discussed in social services.

Other professions

It has been seen in studies that various professions battle with the balance of religion and spirituality in a work setting. For the purposes of this paper, it is important to look at what professions similar to social work are doing. These may also be professions that social workers may closely work with depending on the situation. Viewing what other professions have been doing may be helpful to initiate change in the social work profession.

Psychology will be examined first. Generally, “most studies show psychologists to be less religious than the population they serve and only one in four believe religion and spirituality is relevant to practice” (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 275). However, psychologists are often known to bring up religion and spirituality when gathering information about their clients (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Even if the psychologist is not religious or spiritual, they still tend to discuss this openly with their clients (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Crook-Lyon et al. (2012) states, “psychologists have also expressed the importance of being aware of the role religion and spirituality has in clients’ lives and in their own lives” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 275). This understanding can allow clients to feel heard and that their needs are being fulfilled. Many psychologists are able to approach religion and spirituality in a way specific to the clients they are serving, and this openness may allow clients to be able to receive the intervention they desire.

Nursing is another profession to be compared with social work. Nurses are usually focused on accomplishing certain goals in a healthcare setting that may or may not include the patient’s religious or spiritual identity. This is why it is important to compare this profession to

social work. It is explained that, "Despite its religious roots, the nursing profession has not consistently integrated -clients' religion and spirituality into practice" (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). It is important to note that, "Today, ANA's Code of Ethics includes clients' religion and spirituality in treatment planning" (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). This is similar to cultural competency of religion and spirituality being included in the NASW Code of Ethics. Although each Code of Ethics includes religion and spirituality, they are rarely incorporated into the work nursing and social work complete. However, nurses are willing to offer these activities in certain situations. Grant (2004) states as cited in Oxhandler and Pargament:

With regard to current practice, 29 percent of nurses offer spiritual counseling, 71 percent had offered, suggested , or provided prayer to patients, and nearly all would offer, suggest, or provide spiritual help to patients who had requested it and were about to die. (2014, p. 276)

These situations provide nurses the situation where they deem it appropriate to approach the conversation of religion and spirituality. From these statistics, it is clear that most nurses are only willing to offer religious or spiritual assistance in extreme cases such as death. As described by Cavendish et al. (2004), nurses see religious and spiritual practices as an important activity that promotes health (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). Even though some nurses may share this view, they may not believe they are the individuals who should be providing these types of supports for patients. Additionally, just like with social workers, some nurses may also personally hold religious or spiritual beliefs. Ekedahl and Wengstrom (2010) and Pesut (2013) state, "-nurses also report using religion and spirituality for personal coping, stating that it provides meaning to their work and serves the function of protecting them from

job-related stress” (as cited in Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014, p. 276). Nurses are able to admit their personal beliefs about the benefits they are provided with from their particular religious or spiritual affiliations. This is something that is rarely seen in other professions (Oxhandler & Pargament, 2014). It is important for professionals to focus on the benefits of religious and spiritual activities personally and in the client’s they serve.

It is clear that these two professions both have room to grow. However, both professions appear to be more open about religious and spirituality with their clients than social workers. Social workers may be able to base some of their improvements off of the actions seen in psychology and nursing. Overall, it appears that professionals have a fear of bringing up these topics. However, as seen previously, individuals may wait for their social worker, psychologist, or nurse to discuss religion and spirituality first. Professionals need to be educated on the ethical ways of discussing these topics in order to build greater levels of confidence and cultural competency in their careers.

Discussion

Religion and spirituality are held in various forms and take on a variety of definitions depending on the individual. Thus, these phenomena can be difficult to understand and define, and many work places and professions have problems allowing religion and spirituality to be incorporated into everyday work. Professionals struggle to appropriately define what boundaries should be in place in order to ensure a safe and content working environment for all employees.

However, many benefits can come from allowing religion and spirituality in the workplace because spirituality and religion are often engrained in every activity of individuals’ lives. Therefore, asking someone to leave their religion or spirituality out of work can be restricting and difficult for employees. Individuals have reported feeling suppressed in the

workplace due to their views being discriminated against. For some employees, they may have to make choices against their personal beliefs. This could be disheartening and damaging to someone who is trying to live out a faith life. Incorporating religion and spirituality into all workplaces, including social work services, could be beneficial to employees and clients.

Many social work students feel restricted in the classroom, and few social work curricula include a focus on religion or spirituality. This can cause students with strong religious or spiritual beliefs to feel as though they cannot discuss their beliefs openly in the classroom. In some cases, students have reported feeling discriminated against in the classroom when they have been open about their beliefs (Thaller, 2011). Religion and spirituality are often not brought up in a class-room environment due to negative feedback. This is a problem that should be discussed openly in social work programs in order to better serve students with religious or spiritual backgrounds. This could also be used to assist in the appropriate utilization of faith-based organizations and interventions.

Social services include several organizations and interventions available for clients. However, in some cases, faith-based organizations may be underutilized. This may be due to a lack of information given to social workers about the services or a lack of confidence in referring clients to these services. Either way, it is important and necessary to social workers to educate themselves on religion and spirituality. The NASW Code of Ethics calls on social workers to be culturally competent in order to serve clients to the best of their abilities. However, in some cases, cultural competence is lacking for religion and spirituality. As social workers become educated on the benefits of discussing religion and spirituality, the social work profession may be able to mimic some of the religion and spirituality-based services already used by psychology and nursing professionals.

Overall, social work needs to review its roots in order to serve all clients. Research is difficult to find about the benefits and consequences of religion and spirituality in social work. With more research, social workers may be more open about what they can do to increase the satisfaction of social work clients in regards to religion and spirituality. By gathering more information and understanding of these phenomena, social work professionals can begin to more fully incorporate religion and spirituality into social services.

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