

Commentary on “Spirituality and Stress Management in Healthy Adults”

By: Susan Letvak, PhD, RN

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The Research Study

The purpose of this pilot study was to determine whether a 6-week spiritual intervention (SPIRIT-6©) would reduce stress and increase spiritual well-being in healthy community residents. An additional purpose was to explore how healthy adults describe their spirituality. The SPIRIT-6© intervention required weekly attendance at 90-minute sessions that allowed for group expression of spirituality. Session topics included the meaning and importance of spirituality and religion, how spirituality is expressed to others, forgiveness, and spiritual awareness and well-being. Four booster sessions were also held during the year to reinforce the intervention. The researchers used the term spirituality to refer to both spirituality and religion.

The study used a longitudinal design, guided by Lazarus’s stress and coping model. The survey instruments used in the study included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), the Spiritual Perspectives Scale (SPS), and the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (SWBS). Two open-ended questions asked participants what the meaning of spirituality was to them and how important spirituality was to them in daily life. It is important to note that study participants were recruited from three Protestant churches (two primarily Caucasian and one African American) and thus can be assumed to have had a faith base at the start of the study. In addition, most of the participants were female, and all had at least 2 years of college education.

Data were collected five times during a 12-month period; however, not all study participants completed the study. Although 27 participants completed survey instruments at Time 1, 10 had withdrawn at 6 months, and only 11 remained for the entire data-collection period. All 27 study participants completed the open-ended questions that were collected at Time 1. The researchers found that all the participants believed in a personal relationship with God, felt spirituality was a personal journey often resulting in personal struggle, and thought spirituality gave meaning to life and was expressed in a variety of ways, especially through prayer.

Statistical analyses were done on only three of the five time periods because subjects were dropping out of the study. The researchers found that the SPIRIT-6© intervention was effective in decreasing stress in the study participants. No overall changes were found in perceptions of spiritual well-being, although this was likely because of study participants having high levels of spirituality during all measurement time periods. An additional benefit of the study intervention was heightened awareness of participants’ own spirituality. The researchers concluded that if the SPIRIT-6© intervention is effective in reducing stress

in healthy adults, the potential for assisting patients who are experiencing stress during illness or personal crisis may be even greater.

Application to Holistic Nursing Practice

Recognizing the interrelationships between the mind, body, and spirit is a core value of holistic nursing practice. Thus, interventions that enhance spirituality and reduce perceptions of stress are essential to providing holistic nursing care. Reports by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press (2004) found that since the late 1980s, Americans have become increasingly religious. Yet many nurses fail to address the spiritual needs of their clients and feel unprepared to do so (Cavendish et al, 2004). Capitalizing on the health benefits of spirituality will enable nurses to help optimize their client's health.

This study also documents the use of group discussions to enhance spirituality. Clients can be encouraged to seek out church and community groups who meet to pray or strengthen their sense of purpose in life. In addition, although many health care facilities offer support groups for bereavement and specific health issues, nurses should be encouraged to develop and suggest support groups for spiritual development.

Finally, this study has implications for the practicing holistic nurse. The profession of nursing is inherently stressful. However, when job stress is combined with the stress of everyday life, there can be negative physical and emotional outcomes for nurses (McNeely, 2005; Salmond & Ropis, 2005). Nurses may be able to decrease the negative effects of stress by enhancing their spiritual growth. Nurses need to reflect on their spirituality and seek out ways to enhance their own spiritual growth. Nurses may individually reflect on their spirituality, or they may form groups with other nurses or community members to enhance their spirituality. Nurses may also attend educational seminars and retreats designed to deepen faith and achieve spiritual growth.

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Susan Letvak, PhD, RN, is an associate professor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro School of Nursing. She teaches holistic nursing principles in community health nursing, nursing education, and qualitative nursing research courses. She has most recently coauthored articles on enhancing gerontology in nursing curricula in the *Journal of Professional Nursing*, *Nursing Outlook*, and *Geriatric Nursing*.