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IS RELIGION REALLY IMPORTANT?

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Introduction: Knowing the impact that religious beliefs can have on the etiology, diagnosis and course of psychiatric disorders will help psychiatrists better understand their patients, assessing when the religious or spiritual beliefs are used to cope with mental illness and when they may be exacerbating this disease.

Objectives: Alert to the importance of religion in clinical practice

Methods: Relevant literature review

Results: Several studies have demonstrated the influence of spirituality on physical, mental and health. In 1988, the World Health Organization (WHO) has given rise to the interest in further investigations in this area, with the inclusion of a spiritual aspect of the multidimensional concept of health. The spiritual well-being can be considered a protective factor for psychiatric disorders.

Although it is not possible to determine with accuracy, the mechanisms of interaction of spirituality on health, especially mental health, several studies suggest that exercise can influence the spiritual activities, psychodynamically, through positive emotions. Furthermore, these emotions may be important for mental health in terms of possible psychophysiological and psychoneuroimmunological mechanisms.

Anthropological sources suggest that beliefs in demons, black magic and evil spirits as cause of mental illness and distress are common. They may be less prevalent in western countries but even in Europe it's possible to see patients thought that their condition have been caused by evil and occult possession.

Conclusions: Clinicians should understand the negative and positive roles that religion plays in those with mental disorders and use this in clinical practice.