

Bridging the Gap Between Spirituality and Mental Illness

I am in no way shape or form attempting to denounce or encourage religion to anyone who reads this article. My experience, however, with the higher power has been so powerful in a very positive way. In the past I have been extremely selfish for only reaching out to my divine creator when brought to my knees and needed him the most, but no longer is that true. I now share my life every day with my creator. I personally believe that I wouldn't be here today if it wasn't for my religious beliefs.

When I share my journey with others I always talk about my spiritual beliefs, which have been and continues to this day to be essential to my wellbeing. I have found, through my research, that understanding the complexities of mental illness helps me and others (my readers) better understand what makes us tick. It is so gratifying for me to share with others my experiences and knowledge of mental illness.

Recent research reports that religion and spirituality are resources that help people to cope with stress. Many psychiatrists now believe that religion and spirituality are important to the recovery of their patients. Sigmund Freud, however, felt that religion was linked to neurosis, and some religious experiences are often misdiagnosed as symptoms of mental illness.

The clergy continue to play a crucial role in the US, assisting their parishioners. However, interventions appear to be needed to ensure that clergy members recognize the presence and severity of mental illness. Gurin and colleagues (1960) reported that in the last century 42% of those who were seeking help for emotional support sought help from the clergy and not mental health professionals. But today many more people with mental illness seek professional help. The clergy, unless professionally trained, are not equipped to properly counsel or qualified to handle their parishioners. The clergy continues to play a significant role in the US in helping people with mental illness, but they need to collaborate more closely with healthcare professionals concerning this issue. Unfortunately, there is little data shedding light on how that can be done. Hopefully, in the future, more research will contribute to bridge the gap between clergy and the healthcare profession. According to a (2014 LifeWay Research Survey) only 27% of clergy have a plan to assist families affected by mental illness. Counseling centers have become more prevalent in today's churches than ever before. I applaud all clergy who initiate and provide education to its members who suffer from mental illness.

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