

# THE IMPORTANCE OF SPIRITUALITY FOR 9<sup>TH</sup> TO 12<sup>TH</sup> SEMESTER MEDICAL STUDENTS AT UNIEVANGÉLICA IN MAINTAINING MENTAL HEALTH DURING UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES

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## ABSTRACT

The World Health Organization (WHO) recognizes spirituality not only as a religious practice but also as an indicator of quality of life. For medical students, spirituality appears to exert an important psychological factor related to mental well-being. The objective of this work is to identify the academic reality of medical students during their internship regarding mental aspects and how spirituality influences this process. The results suggest that medical interns predominantly present anxious symptoms, with fewer reports of depressive symptoms, and find in spirituality the strength to overcome the adversities of daily life throughout the course. Caring for others is an important factor that brings even more meaning to their lives. These students strive to live according to their beliefs and feel that there is a purpose for being alive. It is concluded that spirituality emerges as an important resource for these students, helping them to cope with stress and find meaning, comfort, and strength during their undergraduate studies.

**Keywords:** Medical students; Mental health; Spirituality; Socioeconomic Profile.

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of health, established by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1946, consists of a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, which does not mean the total absence of disease. Spirituality can play an important role in this state of well-being, as this concept began to be understood as a way the individual seeks to be and live, which may or may not be related to a religion (MONTEIRO *et al.*, 2020).

The study by Aragão *et al.* (2017) shows that students constitute a portion of the population with serious mental disorders, but those who intend to graduate in medical careers daily inhabit oppressive and competitive environments. The most common mental disorders among medical students at a college in Blumenau (SC) were generalized anxiety disorder and depression (GRETHER *et al.*, 2019).

However, a factor that can mitigate this is spirituality as a form of comfort amidst the chaos of undergraduate studies (BONFIM *et al.*, 2021). Religion has a multifaceted capacity to serve various purposes, offering a source of meaning in

the face of uncertainty, tragedy, and loss. In stressful situations, it can provide people with a sense of belonging, connection, and identity (PARGAMENT, 2010).

Given the above, the objective of this work is to identify the academic reality of 9th to 12th semester medical students in the mental aspect and how spirituality influences these disorders.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This is a descriptive study with a cross-sectional design and a qualitative approach, conducted through the application of a questionnaire that assesses spirituality, religiosity, and mental health. The research location was in Anápolis -- GO, on the premises of the UniEVANGÉLICA college.

The study population consisted of 9th to 12th semester medical students at UniEVANGÉLICA. The total population of medical students at the institution is 1200. A sample size calculation was performed on the Survey Monkey platform, considering a 95% confidence level and 5% significance. This calculation resulted in a sample of 292 students, which was extrapolated to 300 participants. Thus, 100 participating students from the 9th to the 12th semester were needed.

For data collection, the researchers contacted the course secretariat to find out the days and times of outpatient practices for the interns, as these are opportunities that allow for a collective approach while respecting the sample calculation. An invitation was extended to the candidates to participate in the research, with an explanation of the study objectives, risks and benefits of participation, clarification of doubts, and presentation of the Free and Informed Consent Form.

Upon agreeing to participate, the participants answered a questionnaire composed of 35 questions adapted from accepted and validated scales. The aim was to research the level of spirituality, mental health, and relate it to the stage of undergraduate studies in Medicine. Data collection was carried out through an

electronic questionnaire on Google Drive, available at <https://forms.gle/n86RAe3FfmQzpkfy7>.

Regarding data analysis, they will be described as mean, standard deviation, frequencies, percentages, and graphs. The Komolgorov-Smirnov test will be used to verify data normality. For comparison between groups, the *T-Student* test (symmetric distribution) or the *Mann-Whitney* test will be used. A  $P < 0.05$  will be considered for correlating the data, and the data will be analyzed using the *Statistical Package for the Social Science* (SPSS) software.

The work was submitted to the Research Ethics Committee-- CEP/UniEVANGÉLICA following Resolution 466/2012 of the National Health Council (CNS) and has CEP approval through opinion number 6,822,628.

## **PARTIAL RESULTS**

The research consisted of 50 medical internship students from UniEVANGÉLICA. This sample is composed of 60% of students between 22 and 24 years old, where 40% identified more with Catholic Christianity, 32% with Evangelical or Protestant Christianity, 16% with Spiritism, 8% with Agnosticism, 4% with Atheism. There was no participation from students who identified with Judaism, Islam, Umbanda, Candomblé, or Buddhism.

Participants were asked to respond how they identified emotionally most in the last 30 days. Regarding the ability to relax, 36% agreed that they had difficulty relaxing, while 20% strongly agreed. Regarding the tendency to overreact to everyday situations, 44% agreed there is a greater tendency to react this way, 36% of participants disagreed, and 16% strongly disagreed with this statement.

Regarding physical symptoms of anxiety, 48% strongly disagreed about feeling hand tremors, 12% just disagreed, and 36% agreed. Furthermore, 36% strongly disagreed and 16% of participants just disagreed, 36% agreed, and 12% strongly agreed about feeling afraid for no reason. Regarding emotion and sensitivity, 64%

agreed that they were too emotional or sensitive in the last 30 days, while 32% strongly agreed.

Regarding depressive symptoms, 32% disagreed and 32% strongly disagreed about feeling depressed and discouraged in the last 30 days. Furthermore, 44% of participants strongly disagreed that they felt hopeless in that same period. Regarding feeling that they had no value as a person, 52% of participants strongly disagreed.

About spiritual and religious belief and its influence on how they deal with stress in daily college life, only 4% disagreed about it being important to spend time with spiritual thoughts and meditation. Furthermore, 28% agreed and 32% of the interns strongly agreed about striving to live a life according to their beliefs.

The connection with a spiritual being seems to play a crucial role in stress tolerance and overcoming difficult moments throughout undergraduate studies, as 32% feel very helped and 28% feel extremely helped by a spiritual connection. Additionally, 44% of participants feel that this spiritual connection offers much comfort and tranquility, 24% feel it extremely, while 28% report feeling it partially.

Caring for other people is seen as a significant source of meaning in life, with 52% of participants feeling that caring for others provides much meaning in life. Meanwhile, 28% of the interns feel that caring for others is extremely important to bring this meaning.

Regarding the feeling of being here for a reason, 56% strongly agree that there is a reason for being here. Furthermore, 60% of the interns agree that they live according to what they think and feel, and 56% feel a strong connection between mind, body, and soul.

Finally, spirituality is seen as a source of strength and happiness for many, with 60% of participants reporting that spiritual strength helps them a lot to live better and feel happy. Regarding the peace felt, 48% report feeling at peace with themselves and 36% report feeling partially so. Regarding comfort, 48% state that

faith is very important to give them comfort and strength, and 28% state that faith is extremely important to bring this comfort and strength in daily life.

## **CONCLUSION**

The research reveals that the majority of participants reported difficulty relaxing, greater emotional sensitivity, and a tendency to overreact to everyday situations, which is indicative of a state of anxiety. In contrast, depressive symptoms, such as hopelessness and the perception of having no value, were less frequent, suggesting that although stress is a constant, it does not manifest as a deep depressive state. Spirituality functions as an important resource for these students, helping them to cope with stress throughout their undergraduate studies. This spiritual connection provides them with comfort, tranquility, and strength to deal with challenges.

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