

Use of religious coping in Mexican parents of children with intellectual disability

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Abstract

In this article, we discussed the use of religious coping by Mexican parents of children with intellectual disability (ID) to draw attention to the importance of religion and spirituality. Many studies have been published about the use of religious coping by parents of children with ID in many societies including the United States. However, there are limited studies among Mexican parents of children with ID, almost exclusively among Mexican Americans. Religion plays a central role for Latins including Mexican persons. In fact, most Latins believe in some form of Christianity, pray daily, and have religious objects prominently displayed in their homes. Religious faith is an important source of solace and strength for Mexican American families leading parents to take both secular and spiritual actions on behalf of their chronically ill child and their family. The studies revealed that religious coping has been frequently used by parents of children with ID in many cultures around the world, including Mexican American parents because religion and spirituality are important in the lives of most parents. We think that comprehensive studies should be conducted on the religious coping styles of parents of children with ID living in Mexico to fill the gap in the literature.

Keywords: Religious coping. Spirituality. Parents. Children. Intellectual disability

Introduction

Intellectual disability (ID), which affects approximately 1-3% of the population, is a neurodevelopmental disorder that is characterized by deficits in both intellectual functioning and adaptive functioning, whose onset is in the developmental period¹. Coping refers to the fact of dealing successfully with problems or difficult situations². Religion is a Divine law that calls those who have reason to adopt the truths communicated by the prophets³. Spirituality, a facet of religion, is defined as the presence of a relationship with God that affects the individual's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others⁴. Religious coping is an effort to understand and deal with life stressors in ways related

to the sacred, which includes prayer, congregational support, pastoral care, and religious faith⁵. Studies indicate that religion and spirituality can promote mental health through positive religious coping, community and support, and positive beliefs. Research also shows that religion and spirituality can be damaging to mental health by means of negative religious coping, misunderstanding and miscommunication, and negative beliefs⁶. The prevalence of disability is 4.9% in Mexico⁷. However, scant research on religious coping among Mexican parents of children with disabilities has been reported in the literature, probably because health professionals are unaware that Mexican families use religious coping methods. Here, we discussed the use of

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religious coping in Mexican parents of children with ID to draw attention to the importance of religion and spirituality.

Religious coping in Mexican parents of children with ID

Mexico is one of the countries with the greatest number of Catholics^{8,9}. Religion plays a central role for Latins including Mexican persons. In fact, most Latins believe in some form of Christianity, pray daily, and have religious objects prominently displayed in their homes^{10,11}. Religious faith is an important source of solace and strength for Mexican American families leading parents to take both secular and spiritual actions on behalf of their chronically ill child and their family¹².

Many studies have been published about the use of religious coping by parents of children with ID in many societies including the United States¹³⁻¹⁵. However, there are limited studies among Mexican parents of children with ID, almost exclusively among Mexican Americans. Mardiros¹⁶ examined the conception of 33 Mexican American parents (Roman Catholic [76%] and Protestant [24%]) of disabled children. Twenty-seven parents believed in Divine intervention. Six parents did not believe in Divine intervention but did believe that God assisted them in their care of the child. Divine intervention refers to the belief that it is God's will that the parent should have a child with a disability and includes the views that God is punishing the parent, is testing the parent, or has selected the parent for reasons known only to God¹⁶. Mora and Patino Lopez¹⁷ reported that 33.9% of Mexican families of children with cerebral palsy spoke spontaneously about their religious beliefs and the beliefs also affected coping of the families. The beliefs seem to become a weave that leads the families to adopt abnegation by adapting to cultural values¹⁷.

In the series of Cortez¹⁸ including Mexican immigrant parents of children with identified disabilities, the themes of religion and/or spiritual sources are being perceived as both causative and curative. Caring for persons with disabilities was viewed as positive and deserving of divine reward by Mexican Americans. God was also reported to have a direct hand in responding to negative behaviors, being responsive to prayer, and having the power to cure disability¹⁰. Most parents of Mexicans living in the United States who had children with developmental delays viewed both church and faith as supportive, but faith was shown to provide more

support¹⁹. Martino and Gendrin¹¹ reported that Latino parents (including Mexican parents) of children with communication impairment were more likely to seek comfort through their personal beliefs than through organized religion or healers to assist them with their children. The parents generally did not rely on clergymen or their church to assist them with their children¹¹.

Sheets et al.²⁰ noted that religiosity was the most prominent theme from the Latina mothers (13 Mexican and one South American) of children with Down syndrome. Many participants mentioned support from their religious community or place of worship²⁰. In another study, Mexican parents of children with Down syndrome reported more religious ways of coping with situations, higher inhibition of their own emotions, search for professional support for aggressive reactions, cognitive avoidance, and a bigger expression and distortion of problems²¹. In Turquia, the vast majority of parents believe in "belief in destiny and divine decree," one of the pillars of faith. Mothers of children with disabilities were identified to have high religious/spiritual coping²². Surrender to destiny is one of the most commonly used religious coping styles by parents of children with ID in Turquia. Many parents believe in destiny, one of the pillars of belief. Parents who surrender to destiny find peace, relief, ease, comfort, consolation, and strength. He who believes in divine determining is saved from grief²³.

Conclusion

First, we would like to emphasize that religious coping has been frequently used by parents of children with ID in many cultures around the world, including Mexican American parents because religion and spirituality are important in the lives of most parents. Second, we think that comprehensive studies should be conducted on the religious coping styles of parents of children with ID living in Mexico to fill the gap in the literature.

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Conflicts of interest

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest.

Ethical disclosures

Protection of human and animal subjects. The author declares that no experiments were performed on humans or animals for this study.

Confidentiality of data. The author declares that no patient data appear in this article. Furthermore, they have acknowledged and followed the recommendations as per the SAGER guidelines depending on the type and nature of the study.

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