

Status of medical articles on religion and spirituality from past to present

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Abstract

In this article, we have evaluated the status of medical articles related to religion and spirituality published in the last 50 years in the literature to determine the distribution of studies on religion and spirituality by the major religions in the world and decades. There was a continuous increase in the number of articles related to “religion, religious, spiritual, or spirituality,” and the major religions including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism except for Sikhism from 1971-1980 to 2011-2020. A continued increase was also noted in the number of articles on the Quran and the Bible, but not on “Hebrew Bible.” Furthermore, the articles related to Islam and Buddhism showed the highest increase among the major religions. In conclusion, religion and spirituality have been linked to medicine for centuries. Religion and medicine are inseparable because religion is the very life of life, its light, and its basis. We believe that medical articles on religion and spirituality will increase significantly over the next decade as faith is on the rise around the world.

Keywords: Medicine. Article. Religion. Spirituality.

Introduction

Religion is an “explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly, based on some notion and experience of the transcendent.” Each religion has four “C’s”: Creed (the “explanation of life”); Code (of behavior and ethics); Cult (actions relating the believer to the transcendent); Community structure (monarchical, republican, individualistic, etc.)¹. Spirituality in its general meaning is the quality or state of being spiritual or being attached to questions and values concerned with religion. Spirituality is defined as the presence of a relationship with Allah that affects the individual’s self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others².

Religion and spirituality have been linked to medicine and healing for centuries. However, in the early 1900s,

the Flexner report noted that there was no place for religion in medicine; that medicine was strictly a scientific field, not a theological or philosophical one. In the mid to latter 1900s, there were several lay movements that started emphasizing the importance of religion, spirituality, and medicine. Lay religious movements found spiritual practices and beliefs to be important in how people cope with suffering and find inner healing even in the midst of incurable illness. Since the 1960s there has been increased research done in the area of religion and health and spirituality and health³. In this article, we have evaluated the status of medical articles related to religion and spirituality published in the last 50 years in the literature to determine the distribution of studies on religion and spirituality by the major religions in

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Date of reception: 08-03-2024

Date of acceptance: 04-07-2024

DOI: 10.24875/HGMX.24000019

Available online: 13-01-2025

Rev Med Hosp Gen Mex. 2025;88(3):155-158

www.hospitalgeneral.mx

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Table 1. Distribution of articles on religion and spirituality listed on Pubmed

Articles between	Keywords	
	Religion OR religious OR spiritual OR spirituality	
	No.	%
1971 and 1980	1,209	1.9
1981 and 1990	3,591	5.7
1991 and 2000	7,371	11.7
2001 and 2010	13,226	20.9
2011 and 2020	24,602	39.0
2021 and 2023	13,150	20.8
Total Articles	63,149	100.0
Percentage of increase from 1971-1980 to 2011-2020		2,035

Table 2. Distribution of articles by the major religions in the world listed on Pubmed

Articles between	Keywords											
	Islam OR Muslim		Christianity OR Christian		Judaism OR Jewish		Buddhism OR Buddhist		Hinduism OR Hindu		Sikhism OR Sikh	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1971 and 1980	86	1.3	459	5.5	436	4.5	15	0.9	70	4.4	9	3.3
1981 and 1990	342	5.2	798	9.6	911	9.5	97	6.1	157	9.9	44	16.2
1991 and 2000	620	9.4	1,357	16.3	1,802	18.7	146	9.1	195	12.3	32	11.8
2001 and 2010	1,154	17.6	1,574	18.9	2,541	26.4	361	22.6	304	19.1	53	19.5
2011 and 2020	2,872	43.7	2,720	32.7	2,880	29.9	684	42.8	586	36.9	97	35.7
2021 and 2023	1,492	22.7	1,411	17.0	1,050	10.9	296	18.5	273	17.2	37	13.6
Total Articles	6,566	100.0	8,319	100.0	9,620	100.0	1,599	100.0	1,589	100.0	272	100.0
Percentage of increase from 1971-1980 to 2011-2020		3339.5		592.6		660.6		4560.0		837.1		1077.8

the world and decades. To the best of our knowledge, this is the first study about this subject in the literature.

Methods

In this study, articles related to religion and spirituality, listed on Pubmed between 1971 and 2023, were searched using the keywords “Religion OR religious OR spiritual OR spirituality.” The keywords “Islam OR Muslim,” “Christianity OR Christian,” “Buddhism OR Buddhist,” “Hinduism OR Hindu,” and “Sikhism OR Sikh” were used to search for major religions.

Regarding the Holy Books, the keywords “Quran OR Qur’an OR Koran,” “Bible OR Gospel” OR “New Testament” and “Hebrew Bible” OR Torah OR “Old Testament” were used. “Tanakh” used as a synonym for “Hebrew Bible” was also searched on Pubmed, but no result was found. Religions sent by Allah through prophets to lead people from heresy to guidance are called Divine religions. Today, only Islam, Christianity, and Judaism among the Divine religions, continue to exist⁴. Although true religion cannot be of human origin³, articles on major human religions such as Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism were also included in our study.

Table 3. Distribution of articles by the Holy Books in the world listed on Pubmed

Articles between	Keywords					
	Quran OR Qur'an OR Koran		Bible OR Gospel OR "New Testament"		"Hebrew Bible" OR Torah OR "Old Testament"	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1971 and 1980	14	3.5	59	5.3	13	6.5
1981 and 1990	13	3.2	101	9.0	24	12.1
1991 and 2000	42	10.4	222	19.8	41	20.6
2001 and 2010	60	14.9	292	26.1	58	29.1
2011 and 2020	186	46.3	321	28.7	44	22.1
2021 and 2023	87	21.6	126	11.3	19	9.5
Total Articles	402	100.0	1,119	100.0	199	100.0
Percentage of increase from 1971-1980 to 2011-2020		1328.6		544.1		338.5

Results

The distribution of articles on religion and spirituality listed on Pubmed by the major religions in the world and decades is seen in tables 1-3. There was a continuous increase in the number of articles related to "religion, religious, spiritual, or spirituality," and the major religions including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism except for Sikhism from 1971-1980 to 2011-2020. Regarding the Holy Books, a continued increase was noted in the number of articles on the Quran and the Bible, but not on "Hebrew Bible" from 1971-1980 to 2011-2020. Furthermore, articles related to Islam and Buddhism showed the highest increase among the major religions.

Discussion

Since ancient ages, human beings have tried to examine and evaluate the relationship between spirituality, religion, and medicine⁵. In fact, religion and medicine are no strangers. They have a long, intertwined, tumultuous history, going back thousands of years. Only within the past 200-300 years have these twin healing traditions been clearly separate. The physical disease was understood largely in religious or spiritual terms until several hundred years ago⁶. Nowadays, physicians are not well-prepared to deal with the patient's psychological experience of illness, particularly in situations where medical treatments are not working and both doctor and patient feel helpless against the relentless advance of the disease. It is in such situations that religion has provided comfort and hope for millennia⁶. The

interface of spirituality, quality of life, and mental health is fascinating and sublime religion and spirituality particularly play an essential role in the caregiving of patients with terminal illnesses and chronic medical conditions⁵. In addition, awareness of our patients' spiritual or religious beliefs helps us to be more aware of our own motivations, as spirituality and religion are important components that shape the behaviors of many clinicians⁷.

Religion has existed since the first man and the first Prophet Adam (Alayhi As-Salam) and will continue until the Day of Judgment. Religion is the most fundamental social institution, and, in one form or another, will always be a part of social life. Today faith is on the rise and 85% of people around the globe identify with a religion^{8,9}. On the other hand, studies in the 21st century suggest that, in terms of percentage and worldwide spread, Islam is the fastest-growing major religion in the world¹⁰. In parallel with the increase in religious belief in the world's population, we have found that the number of articles on religion and spirituality markedly increased in the medical literature in the last decades. Based on the number of articles between 2021 and 2023, it can easily be said that articles on religion and spirituality will increase much more in the next decade.

Conclusion

Religion and spirituality have been linked to medicine for centuries. Religion and medicine are inseparable because religion is the very life of life, its light, and its basis¹¹. Our findings showed that medical studies about

religion, spirituality, and the major religions including Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, and Hinduism except for Sikhism continuously increased from 1971 to 2020. The articles related to Islam and Buddhism showed the highest increase among the major religions. We believe that medical articles on religion and spirituality will increase significantly over the next decade as faith is on the rise around the world.

Funding

The author declares that there was no type of funding.

Conflicts of interest

The author declares that he has no conflicts of interest.

Ethical considerations

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

Confidentiality, informed consent, and ethical approval. The study does not involve patient personal data nor requires ethical approval. The SAGER guidelines do not apply.

Declaration on the use of artificial intelligence.

The author declares that no generative artificial intelligence was used in the writing of this manuscript.

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