

Influence of Spirituality on the Rehabilitation Experience of Christians Experiencing a Major Life Event

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The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of individuals who identify as Christian and the influence of spirituality in their lives after a major life event, defined as “any situation or circumstance that alters a person’s life in a substantial way, implying some level of role change or adaptation” (Maley, Pagana, Velenger & Humbert, 2016, p. 1). It is within the occupational therapy scope of practice to address spirituality but many occupational therapists do not feel equipped to address spirituality with their clients (Breutzmann & Songy, 2014). Approximately 70% of individuals living in the United States identify with a Christian worldview (Alper & Sandstrom, 2016) but there are no studies as to how spirituality as specifically experienced from a Christian worldview influences the individual’s rehabilitation process. Humbert’s Conceptual Model of Spirituality (2016) was developed for the occupational therapy profession but has not been validated by independent research. The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to understand how spirituality impacts occupational participation, performance and engagement as well as quality of life, how the participants experienced their occupational therapists addressing spirituality, and how the lived experiences of the participants correlate to Humbert’s Conceptual Model of Spirituality. Participants were over 18, identified as Christian, and had experienced a major life event resulting in rehabilitation. They were recruited through nominated sampling by healthcare providers and were invited to recruit others who met study criteria. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews of six individuals and analyzed using the Moustakas approach through the steps of epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis. The research team used reflexivity, triangulation, an audit trail, member checking, intercoder agreement, and peer debriefing to ensure the accuracy and trustworthiness of the study. Four themes were identified: (a) the occupational therapy experience, (b) a journey of doing, (c) getting through challenges, and (d) reflections of being. The occupational therapy experience included the participants response to therapy, what the therapist did or didn’t do during therapy, whether or not the therapist addressed spirituality, and the participant’s opinions on whether occupational therapists should address spirituality in practice. Theme two included a description of the participants abilities and perception of life’s purpose before and after their life-changing event as well as how their experience of spirituality influenced their occupational choice and engagement during their rehabilitation and afterwards. In theme three, specific challenges faced by participants are identified as well as how general coping strategies, spiritual supports and spiritual coping strategies helped them to maneuver through difficult times and challenges. The theme reflections of being describes how the participants’ life perspective, quality of life, and state of being was altered before, during, and after their major life event and how it was associated with their experience of spirituality. Study findings support the influence of spirituality on occupational participation, performance, and engagement and overall quality of life but lack of occupational therapist involvement. The categories of Humbert’s Model of Spirituality are consistent with salient study themes and demonstrate the applicability of this model for individuals identifying as Christian. Findings support the need to address spirituality with clients experiencing acquired physical disabilities and inclusion of spirituality in occupational therapy education.

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