

Mgr Paulina Trębicka
Instytut Psychologii
Wydział Filozofii Chrześcijańskiej
Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana
W Wyszyńskiego

Mgr Anna Cichocka
Instytut Psychologii
Wydział Filozofii Chrześcijańskiej
Uniwersytet Kardynała Stefana
W Wyszyńskiego

Spirituality, religiosity and satisfaction in a romantic relationship

Duchowość, religijność i satysfakcja w romantycznym związku

Abstract:

Spirituality and religion as well as body and mind are important aspects of human life. It turns out that these are values having importance for individuals as well as for interpersonal relationships. This is very complex part of marital and family life which can fulfill many adaptive functions. Spirituality and religiosity have an impact on many areas of functioning such as couple's commitment, overall satisfaction with relationship, persistence of the marriage or decision about divorce, communication and conflict solving (Mahoney et al., 2001). Joint prayer and religious communication can affect the spiritual development of each spouse and contributes to better coping with difficult situations. Moreover, issues to which attention should be paid are the functioning of relationships of persons with different religious views and the significance of the spiritual life of husbands for the functioning of marriage. This article focuses on the connections between spirituality and religiosity with satisfaction, religious communication and problem solving in romantic relationships.

Key words: spirituality, religiousness, religious communication, coping, relationship's satisfaction

Abstrakt: Duchowość i religijność to obok ciała i umysłu ważne aspekty życia człowieka. Okazuje się, że są one wartościami mającymi znaczenie nie tylko dla indywidualnych osób, ale i dla relacji międzyludzkich. Jest to bardzo złożona część życia małżeńskiego i rodzinnego, która może pełnić wiele funkcji adaptacyjnych. Duchowość i religijność ma wpływ na wiele obszarów funkcjonowania, takich jak zaangażowanie pary, ogólne zadowolenie ze związku, trwałość małżeństwa lub decyzja o rozwodzie, komunikacja i rozwiązywaniu konfliktów (Mahoney i in., 2001). Wspólna modlitwa i komunikacja religijna mogą wpływać na rozwój duchowy każdego małżonka i przyczyniać się do lepszego radzenia sobie w trudnych sytuacjach. Ponadto kwestiami, na które należy zwrócić uwagę, są funkcjonowanie relacji osób o różnych poglądach religijnych oraz znaczenie życia duchowego mężów dla funkcjonowania małżeństwa. Ten artykuł koncentruje się na związkach między duchowością i religijnością a satysfakcją, komunikacji religijnej i rozwiązywanie problemów w relacjach romantycznych.

Słowa kluczowe: duchowość, religijność, komunikacja religijna, radzenie sobie, satysfakcja ze związku

Introduction

The spiritual aspect of a person is, next to the body and mind, one of the elements of the triadic human anthropology (Smurzyńska, 2012). Such a view of a person as a being, whose actions come down to the sphere of mind, body and spirit with the simultaneous interactions of these spheres on themselves, gives a fuller picture of him/her. This approach is related to psychology and supports an integral treatment, involving in the healing and recovery process doctors, psychologists and spiritual guides.

In psychology there aren't clear-cut definitions of spirituality and religiosity. For the purposes of the research, there are taken some operationalized definitions, resulting from the concept which is the basis of the researched problem. For that reason, (for: Jarosz, 2010), the most important features of both concepts will be pointed out. Spirituality is considered on the individual level of the individual, but religiousness on the group or social level. These concepts are related to each other, although often considered as different. Spirituality and religiosity are dynamic, they can be built during the whole human life. Those are complex and multilevel constructs, because they refer to spheres such as: biological, moral, cognitive, emotional, relational, cultural, social and personality.

We can observe recently the growth of interest in the subject of spirituality and religiosity in psychology (Heszen-Niejodek, Gruszczyńska, 2004). The spiritual development of a person is one of the issues of developmental psychology, connected with its cognitive functioning and experiencing emotions (Hill et al., 2000). The dimension of spirituality is also dealt with in health psychology, in the context of problems, resulting from illness, health (somatic, psychological, social) or forms of psychotherapy (Harris et al., 1999, Hatch et al., 1998, for: Heszen-Niejodek, Gruszczyńska, 2004).

Therefore, spirituality is not the only important sphere of singular life. Marital relationship, which is the foundation of family life, deserves attention. The research conducted by the Pew Research Center's Religious Landscape Study¹ shows that almost half, or 47% of all adults in a marriage declare that sharing religious beliefs with a spouse is important for a successful marriage. This view is shared in 64% of people who share the same religion, 24% in non-confessional relationships and 17% in marriage of believers and non-believers.

The previous studies of the role of religiosity and spirituality in the intimate relationship were concerned with divorce, general satisfaction, engagement, communication and conflict and physical aggression (Mahoney et al., 2001). Meta-analytic review of research by Mahoney et al. (2001) showed that religiousness is a complex and significant element that performs adaptive functions in marital relationships and family life. The role of religiousness

<https://www.pewforum.org/>

and spirituality in the life of the family was omitted or simplified in psychological research. Many studies use single-item, so individual elements of religiosity were examined, such as religious affiliation, the frequency of religious practices (including prayers), and the value and importance of religion in human life (Mahoney, Tarakeshwar, 2005).

The presented work focuses on the relationships of religiosity and spirituality with three important elements of the couple's life: satisfaction with the relationship, religious communication and problem solving. Those studies were selected due to the conceptual, methodological and actual values.

1. Satisfaction in relationship

Sullivan (2001) conducted longitudinal tests on 2 attempts of honeymooners to test 3 explanatory models. 172 (study 1) and 56 (study 2), pairs of marriages have been tested for religiousness (4 item scale based on The Religiosity Measure constructed by Rohrbaugh and Jessor, 1975, for: Sullivan, 2001), quality and functioning of the relationship (Marital Adjustment Test (MAT; Locke & Wallace, 1959, for: Sullivan, 2001), behavior during resolving the dispute (10-minute discussion with the spouses on selected problems, coded using the Specific Affect Coding System (SPAFF; see Gottman & Krokoff, 1989, for: Sullivan, 2001) and demographic variables (demographic survey), it turned out that the neuroticism of the husband mediated the influence of religiosity on the feeling of satisfaction with the relationship. In marriages with a husband with a low level of neuroticism, religiousness had a positive effect and in couples with a husband with a high level of neuroticism - negative. This effect was visible after some period of time (about 4 years of marriage).

Fincham and others (2008) conducted three studies to test the relationship of spirituality (especially prayer for a partner) with a satisfaction in a romantic relationship. The research involved mainly the use of several item tools, resulting from the operationalization of such variables as: a prayer for a partner, forgiveness, cooperation, readiness to sacrifice; 4 positions Item Response Theory (Funk and Rogge, 2007, for: Fincham and others 2008); Communication Patterns Questionnaire-Constructive Communication Subscale (CPQ-CC; Heavey, Larson, Zumtobel, & Christensen, 1996, for: Fincham and others, 2008). The first study was longitudinal and concerned the establishment of time dependencies; participated in it N = 302 students in a relationship. As in the previous studies, it turned out that the prayer for the partner was a predictor of satisfaction in a relationship at a later time, but not vice versa. Study 2 (N = 191) was aimed at checking whether prayer or specific prayer (for a partner) is associated with the effect of satisfaction in the relationship. Praying for a partner uniquely explains variability (variance) of satisfaction in a relationship that is also influenced by positive and negative dyadic behaviors. In the third study 360 persons participated. The mediators of the impact of a prayer for a partner on

satisfaction were examined. The mediating variable was a high commitment. The general conclusion from the research was that in the long-term, a prayer for a partner affects the commitment, bringing satisfaction in the relationship.

Subsequent studies by Fincham and others (2011) over satisfaction in the relationship were carried out on the group of 487 African American couples. The couples filled The Daily Spiritual Experience Scale (DSES; Underwood & Teresa, 2002, for: Fincham and others, 2011), The Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983, for: Fincham and others, 2011), The Positive and Negative Quality in Marriage Scale (Fincham & Linfield, 1997, for: Fincham and others, 2011) and a 2 item questionnaire about religiosity. The research concerned the measurement of religiosity and spirituality. Interestingly, it turns out that spirituality is more of an individual variable and religiosity is a variable of couple. The husband's religiousness is really important because it was related to the satisfaction of both husbands and wives. The own and partner spirituality was associated with satisfaction in the relationship for both partners.

The studies by Rostami and Gol (2014) concerned with the relationship of spiritual intelligence with the satisfaction of marriage. 240 people completed research tools: ENRICH Marital Satisfaction Questionnaire and Spiritual Intelligence Questionnaire. The results showed that a spiritual intelligence as one of the elements of spiritual life explains 35.2% of the variability of satisfaction from the relationship and the best prediction for the criterion variable. After the addition of "perception of communication with the origins of the universe", the rate of variation will reach 37.1%. In addition, the elements of spiritual intelligence explain the satisfaction of relationships of men and women differently. The authors of the study pay attention to consider religious beliefs in the context of the start and resolution of conflicts in marriages.

Lichter and Carmalt (2009) studied the relationship between religion and the quality of marriage in couples (N = 433) with low income. It was assumed that religion functions as a buffer for the effects of stress, resulting from earnings and is the strength of marriage. Research tool was Marital and Relationship Survey (MARS; Moore and others, 2004, for: Lichter and Carmalt, 2009), new questionnaire created for the purpose of the research examined religiousness in 4 dimensions: belonging, beliefs, censorship and participation. It turned out that the common belief about God's plan for the relationship of the respondents and the common practices of services are more important for the quality of marriage than belonging to a given religion and personal religious beliefs.

DeMaris and others (2010) examined 178 marriages expecting the first child to check whether religiosity is a moderator of the effects of inequality felt by spouses and their mental well-being. The subjects completed the Kansas Marital Satisfaction Index (Schumm and others, 1986, for: DeMaris and others, 2010), two-item subscale from Kerig's (1996, for: DeMaris and others, 2010) Conflicts and Problem-Solving, Center for Epidemiological

Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977), National Survey of Families and Households (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988, in: DeMaris and others 2010) to measure equitableness of the marriage, the Theistic Sanctification of Marriage Scale and The Non-Theistic Sanctification of Marriage Scale. It turned out that sanctification of marriage moderates more the effect of inequality than general religiosity. At a high level of sanctification, the relative advantage had little effect. The interaction between these two variables was stronger in the wives. Women were less well-being than husbands, because they considered themselves over benefited in a relationship.

2. Religious communication

Reiter and Gee (2008) studied 353 adolescents, who were in romantic relationships in terms of openness in communication, regarding to differences and cultural and religious similarities, partner support and relationship distress. Tools used in the study were The Global Distress Scale (GDS) from the Marital Satisfaction Inventory-Revised (Snyder, 1996, for: Reiter and Gee, 2008), The Cultural Behaviors Questionnaire (CBQ; Gee, McNerney, & Scher, 2008, for : Reiter and Gee, 2008), The Religious Behaviors Questionnaire (RBQ, Gee et al., 2008, for: Reiter and Gee, 2008). In intercultural relations, a bigger openness in communication was associated with lower levels of stress and greater satisfaction in the relationship. In teenagers relationships with different confessions open communication was associated with a lower level of relationship distress. Interestingly, the involvement in an interfaith relationship did not predict disintegration, unlike than in multicultural relationships.

Research conducted by David and Stafford (2015) on a sample of 342 marriages was related to the relationship between religious communication of the couple and the satisfaction in the relationship. Tools used in the study were Quality of Marriage Index (QMI; Norton, 1983, for: David and Stafford, 2015); Individual Relationship with God (IRG, Neff, 2006, for: David and Stafford, 2015), Joint Religious Communication (JRC; Mahoney et al., 1999, for: David and Stafford, 2015), Forgiveness (Fincham & Beach, 2002, for: David and Stafford, 2015). It turns out that religious communication is positively related to the quality and satisfaction of marriage. Indirectly, an individual relationship with God is related to the good quality of marriage as it affects the religious communication of the spouses. The ability to forgive both husband and wife was positively associated with the quality of marriage, while the lack of forgiveness (including husband and wife) turned out to be detrimental to their relationship. Couples professing the same faith declared greater marital satisfaction compared to the declaration of inter-religious marriages. Interestingly, the connection of satisfaction with common religious communication turned out to be stronger in inter-religious marriages than in marriages of the same faith.

3. Conflicts

Research conducted by Curtis and Ellison (2002) aimed to test whether heterogeneous religiously couples are arguing more often than religiously homogenous pairs and whether religious differences are related to the specific subjects of dispute. 2,945 people in the first marriage and living together were asked about the frequency of disputes regarding: money, housework, time spending together, children, parents-in-law, sex, having or not having children; hetero- and homogeneity of the religious relationship and the frequency of religious practices undertaken. The persons also filled in the index of theological conservatism based on two items following Ellison and colleagues (1999, for: Curtis and Ellison, 2002). It turns out that the presence of religious differences is connected positively with the frequency of conflicts. Frequent conflicts (in general as well as regarding housework and finance) are also found in marriages of couples with theological divergences. The most frequent disputes occur in marriages in which the wife is more theologically conservative than her husband. Interestingly, the religiousness of men is on a small scale related to the frequency of disputes (in general, and sex, money, housework, spending time). Regarding the religiousness of women has not shown such a connection. These all effects were not on a high level.

Butler and others (2002) checked whether a prayer can help to solve marital problems. 217 spouses (followers of Christian religions) completed the Prayer-Conflict II Questionnaire (PC II) Butler and others (1998, for: Butler et al., 2002). The respondents declared a sense of gentleness in relation, healing and experience change of responsibility as the main effects of a prayer during quarrels. A prayer, therefore, can be an independent intervention of believers spouses during conflicts.

Kusner and others (2014) studied 164 married couples in a stressful and conflicting relationship which is going to parenthood. The tests were conducted in the 9th month of pregnancy and in the 4th, 7th and 13th months of the child's life. The respondents completed the questionnaires of satisfaction from the relationship (2 sub-groups Mahoney et al. 1999, for: Kusner and others., 2014), spiritual intimacy (4 items from the Brelsford and Mahoney income index, 2008, for: Kusner and others, 2014), conjugal love (10-item love-interdependence subscale Braiker and Kelley's, 1979, for: Kusner and others, 2014), common problems solving (Conflict and Problem-Solving Strategies Kerig, 1996, for: Kusner et al., 2014) and participated in 10 min. recorded marriage interaction. The results showed that the sanctification of marriage for both spouses predict more positive attitudes of one or both spouses. The spiritual intimacy of both predicted more positive and less negative attitudes both in husband and wife. The wife's spiritual intimacy is the prediction of a more positive attitude of both and less negative in her husband. For husbands, sanctification it predicted more positive attitudes of both spouses. The skills of each spouse's cooperation and marital

love (in the opinion of husbands) correlated with the observed behavior of the spouses.

4. The aspects of intimate relationship

Larson and Olson (2004) studied the relationship between conjugal dynamics and spiritual beliefs. A group of 24671 spouses completed the ENRICH couple inventory developed by Olson, Fournier, and Druckman (1983, for: Larson and Olson, 2004). This questionnaire includes such scales as: Marriage Satisfaction, Personality Issues, Couple Flexibility, Children and Parenting, Couple Closeness, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Sexual Relationship, Family and Friends, Role Relationship, Financial Management, Leisure Activities. The results showed that the spirituality of the couple is related to various aspects of the functioning of the marriage. A comparison of spouses with a high and a low level of spiritual consistency showed that the former achieved significantly higher levels of the above-mentioned aspects of the marital relationship.

Summary

Many studies, both psychological and sociological, show how important and adaptive is the role played by religion and spirituality in the intimate relationship. The effects of the influence of spiritual life on satisfaction with the relationship can be seen after a few years (Sullivan, 2001, Fincham and others, 2008). So, the stability in practice and religious communication is important. We can see a particularly significant influence of the husband's spiritual life on the quality of marriage in the assessment of both spouses (Fincham and others, 2011; Curtis and Ellison, 2002, Kusner and others, 2014). The more important role is played by religious communication and mutual prayer which support the individual spirituality of each of the spouses and help to overcome difficult situations and conflicts (e.g. Reiter, Gee, 2008; David, Stafford, 2015; Butler and others, 2002; Curtis and Ellison, 2002). One of the main and important topics in a better understanding of the impact of spiritual and religious life on the quality of intimate relationships is the functioning of relationships of people with different religious views (e.g. Reiter, Gee, 2008, Curtis and Ellison, 2002).

Studies on the religiousness and spirituality of the spouses have their limitations. Many studies are still carried out with the use one or several item scales which allow to examine single aspects of religiosity and spirituality (Mahoney and others, 2001). However, it should be remembered that these are multidimensional and complex constructs (for: Jarosz, 2010). There is little research regarding the possibility of negative influence of religiosity and spirituality on the quality of the intimate relationship (Sullivan, 2001).

Bibliography:

- Butler, M. H., Stout, J. A., & Gardner, B. C. (2002). Prayer as a conflict resolution ritual: Clinical implications of religious couples' report of relationship softening, healing perspective, and change responsibility. *The Journal of Family Therapy*, 30(1), 19-37.
- Curtis, K. T., Ellison, C. G. (2002). Religious heterogamy and marital conflict: Findings from the National Survey of Families and Households. *Journal of Family Issues*, 23(4), 551-576.
- David, P., Stafford, L. (2015). A relational approach to religion and spirituality in marriage: The role of couples' religious communication in marital satisfaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, 36(2), 232-249.
- DeMaris, A., Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I. (2010). Sanctification of marriage and general religiousness as buffers of the effects of marital inequity. *Journal of Family Issues*, 31(10), 1255-1278.
- Fincham, F. D., Ajayi, C., Beach, S. R. (2011). Spirituality and marital satisfaction in African American couples. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 3(4), 259.
- Fincham, F. D., Beach, S. R., Lambert, N., Stillman, T., Braithwaite, S. (2008). Spiritual behaviors and relationship satisfaction: A critical analysis of the role of prayer. *Journal of Social and Clinical Psychology*, 27(4), 362-388.
- Heszen-Niejodek, I., Gruszczyńska, E. (2004). Wymiar duchowy człowieka, jego znaczenie w psychologii zdrowia i jego pomiar. *Przegląd Psychologiczny*, 47(1), 15-31.
- Hill, P.C., Pargament, K.I., Hood, R.W., Jr., McCullough, M.E., Swyers, J.P., Larson, D.B. Zinbauer, B.J. (2000). Conceptualizing religion and spirituality: Points of commonality, points of departure. *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 30, 51-77.
- Jarosz, M. (2010). Pojęcie duchowości w psychologii. *Studia z Psychologii w KUL*, 16, 9-22.
- Kusner, K.G., Mahoney, A., Pargament, K.I., DeMaris, A. (2014). Sanctification of marriage and spiritual intimacy predicting observed marital interactions across the transition to parenthood. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 28(5), 604-614.
- Larson, P.J., Olson, D.H. (2004). Spiritual beliefs and marriage: A national survey based on ENRICH. *The Family Psychologist*, 20(2), 4-8.
- Lichter, D. T., Carmalt, J. H. (2009). Religion and marital quality among low-income couples. *Social Science Research*, 38(1), 168-187.
- Mahoney, A., Pargament, K. I., Tarakeshwar, N., Swank, A. (2001). Religion in the home in the 1980s and 90s: A meta-analytic review and conceptual analysis of religion, marriage, and parenting. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 559-596.
- Mahoney, A., Tarakeshwar, N. (2005). Religion's role in marriage and parenting in daily life and during family crises. *Handbook of the psychology of religion and spirituality*, 177-195.
- Reiter, M. J., Gee, C. B. (2008). Open communication and partner support in intercultural and interfaith romantic relationships: A relational maintenance approach. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 25(4), 539-559.
- Rostami, A.M., Gol, H.C. (2014). Prediction of marital satisfaction based on spiritual intelligence. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 116, 2573-2577.
- Smurzyńska, A. (2012). Dusza-umysł-ciało. Rozważania nad triadyczną antropologią. *Racjonalia. Z punktu widzenia humanistyki*, (2), 182-192.

Sullivan, K.T. (2001). Understanding the relationship between religiosity and marriage: An investigation of the immediate and longitudinal effect of religiosity on newlywed couples. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 15, 610–626.