

Spiritual Development in Adulthood and Later Life from the Perspective of Psychology and Religious Studies

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ABSTRACT

Spiritual development occurs in two significant phases in human life, namely adulthood and later life. The interdisciplinary approach used to examine this combines the perspectives of psychology and religious studies to understand the complex dynamics involved in an individual's religious journey. Spiritual development is a highly personal and variable phenomenon, influenced by various factors such as personal experiences, culture, and environmental changes. The reference sources reviewed and analyzed by the author were obtained from various sources, including reference books and research published in journals. The assessment is limited to the integration of the perspectives of psychology and religious studies in a comprehensive analysis of spiritual development in two phases of life, namely adulthood and later life. The integration of psychology and religious studies perspectives holds significant importance in understanding spiritual development. The results of the research conducted by Yuhaniah (2022) indicate that the relationship between the spiritual dimension and religion in the context of the relationship between religious belief and psychological well-being is based on how an individual adopts an attitude of surrender to a divine entity with extraordinary power. This attitude of surrender and devotion can result in a positive and optimistic outlook in individuals, subsequently fostering positive feelings towards God.

Keywords: Psychological Perspective, Religious Studies, Spiritual Development

INTRODUCTION

The development of religious spirituality in adults and the elderly is a topic that is increasingly attracting the interest of researchers from various disciplines, including psychology and religious studies. Spiritual development occurs in two significant phases in human life, namely adulthood and later life. The interdisciplinary approach used to examine this combines the perspectives of psychology and religious studies to understand the complex dynamics involved in an individual's religious journey.

Spiritual development is a highly personal and variable phenomenon, influenced by various factors such as personal experiences, culture, and environmental changes. The influence of these personal experiences is evident in how an individual understands, practices, and perceives the presence of religion in their life. For example, mystical experiences can lead someone to profound and transformative experiences. An individual may feel a direct connection to the Divine or undergo deep spiritual enlightenment. This can strengthen and deepen their religious beliefs. Culture determines the norms, values, and belief systems accepted by society. Individuals tend to adopt the dominant beliefs and values within their culture. For example, a strong culture in a particular religion can influence individuals to follow similar beliefs and practices. Environmental changes can include changes in social, economic, cultural, and geographical contexts. For instance, when someone moves to a new environment or experiences geographical mobility, they may be exposed to various religious traditions and different beliefs. This can affect how individuals understand religion and may lead to exploration and changes in their religious beliefs.

Adults often face new challenges in their lives that can affect how they view religion, while the elderly may

undergo deep reflections on the meaning of spirituality in the later stages of their lives. Although much research has been conducted on the development of religious spirituality, there is still room for deeper exploration of changes and continuity in this process as individuals age.

The study of spiritual development in adults and the elderly holds significant urgency in the social, psychological, and individual well-being contexts. A better understanding of how and why changes occur in an individual's spirituality can help mental health professionals, social workers, and researchers formulate more effective interventions. Furthermore, this research can provide valuable insights for individuals who wish to undergo the process of spiritual development more consciously and meaningfully.

In previous literature, many articles have investigated various aspects of religious spiritual development in adults and the elderly. Some focus on the role of religion in coping with crises and life changes, while others delve into the relationship between religion and psychological well-being. However, there is limited research that integrates the perspectives of psychology and religious studies in a comprehensive analysis of spiritual development in these two stages of life.

Understanding how individuals transform themselves through their religious journeys, especially when facing challenges and changes in their lives, is crucial for humanity (Frankl, 1959). Understanding individual differences in religious experiences and promoting integration between psychology and religious studies for a better understanding. This can be a crucial foundation for examining the development of religious spirituality in different life stages (Hill and Pargament, 2008). Beliefs and religious experiences evolve with age through understanding psychology and religious studies (Paloutzian and Park, 2013). Religious experiences can influence the development of religious spirituality from both psychological and religious studies perspectives (Shults and Sandage, 2006). Religion can act as a moderator in the relationship between depression and health. In other words, religion can play a significant role in influencing how depression affects a person's health (Wink, Dillon, and Larsen, 2005).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Development of Religious Spirituality

The concept of religious spiritual development involves various essential elements in an individual's religious dimension. One of them is belief, which encompasses the value system, doctrines, or principles that individuals hold, such as belief in God or moral values. Besides beliefs, religious practices are also key elements in the development of religious spirituality. This includes activities like worship, prayer, fasting, and other actions that follow specific religious teachings.

Another significant element in the development of religious spirituality is spiritual experiences, where individuals feel connected to the transcendent or have profound experiences related to their religious dimension. These experiences can be moments of peace or deep mystical experiences. When someone reaches the peak of a spiritual experience, the boundaries that separate them from the universe and God begin to fade (Vivekananda, 2020). The development of religious spirituality is an ongoing process, and not all individuals reach higher stages in this development (Fowler, 1981). Humans, as creations of God, are endowed with various potentials (fitrah) that are present from birth. Inclination and the need for religion are one of these fitrah (Kosasih, 2018).

Religious commitment reflects the extent to which individuals are willing to commit to their religion. This includes loyalty, involvement in religious communities, and adherence to religious teachings and values. Religion, in its various forms and expressions, has been shown to relate positively and negatively to the entire range of human behaviors, experiences, and emotions. However, the field of psychology has only

occasionally paid attention to the psychological processes underlying human religiosity (Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park, 2005).

Psychological Theories of Religious Development

Erikson's Developmental Theory

Erikson's theory of development regarding religious spirituality highlights the importance of identity in the context of individual development. Erikson, a renowned developmental psychologist, identified eight stages of development that span an individual's entire life cycle. Although he does not explicitly have a specific stage for the development of religious spirituality, some stages in his theory are relevant to the development of religious and spiritual aspects in individuals.

One relevant stage is the Intimacy vs. Isolation stage, which occurs during early adulthood (ages 20s to early 40s). During this stage, individuals face questions about personal identity, social relationships, and romantic relationships. In the context of the development of religious spirituality, this stage may reflect the search for religious or spiritual identity and how this identity impacts relationships with others.

Erikson also recognized the importance of self-awareness and identity in individual development. This can be applied to the development of religious spirituality, as individuals need to understand who they are in the religious context, what they believe, and how these beliefs shape their worldview. The importance of having faith in the context of life may include religious or spiritual aspects as an integral part of an individual's identity (Erikson, 1968).

Identity Formation Theory

The development of religious spirituality in individuals occurs through different stages of religious development throughout their lives. These stages reflect the level of understanding, complexity, and depth of beliefs and religious practices. Among these stages are the stages of compliance, exploration, and religious maturity (Fowler, 1981). Compliance Stage (Stage 1 – Intuitive-Projective Faith): This stage is usually found in children and individuals in the early stages of religious development. In this stage, an individual's beliefs are based on imagination and intuitive perception. Individuals accept religious beliefs from external authorities such as parents, teachers, or religious figures without many questions. They may have a simple and literal understanding of religious concepts like God and Heaven.

Exploration Stage (Stage 2 – Mythic-Literal Faith): This stage is a transitional stage typically experienced during adolescence and early adulthood. In this stage, individuals begin to ask deeper questions and reflect on their religious beliefs. They start to understand religious stories as symbolic and seek a deeper understanding of moral values and meanings behind religious beliefs. This is a period when individuals try to understand morality, ethics, and religious principles in a more contextual way.

Religious Maturity Stage (Stage 3 – Synthetic-Conventional Faith): This stage characterizes greater religious maturity and typically occurs in adulthood. In this stage, individuals have integrated their understanding of religion into their worldview. They can view religion more flexibly and contextually. Furthermore, they develop a deeper commitment to their religious beliefs and can actively participate in religious communities. Individuals at this stage can understand that there are various approaches to religion and accept diversity in religious beliefs.

It is important to remember that the development of religious spirituality is a complex process, and individuals can move forward and backward in these stages depending on their life experiences. This concept helps explain how individuals experience and develop their beliefs and practices in religion over time.

Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory

This theory describes how individuals develop their understanding of morality and ethics over time. Although it does not explicitly focus on the development of religious spirituality, the concepts in this theory can help us understand how individuals in adulthood and later life may integrate religious and spiritual values into their lives.

Kohlberg's Developmental Theory identifies six stages of moral development divided into three levels. In the early stages (Level 1), individuals may view morality in the context of punishment and personal benefit. However, as development progresses, they begin to consider social norms, social contracts, and universal ethical principles (Levels 2 and 3). In the context of the development of religious spirituality, individuals who reach higher stages in Kohlberg's theory may be more inclined to understand and apply their religious and spiritual values in the context of higher moral principles, such as justice, human dignity, and human rights. They can see religion and spirituality as a strong moral guiding source based on universal values. Moral principles have the same logical status as principles in other fields of science such as chemistry or physics. They are the necessary presuppositions of a nonarbitrary empirical order, and they help us perceive and structure that order (Kohlberg, 1981).

METHOD

In this research titled "Development of Religious Spirituality in Adults and Older Adults from the Perspective of Psychology and Religious Studies," the methodology used is the literature review method. The reference sources reviewed and analyzed by the author are obtained from various sources, including reference books and research articles published in journals. The study is focused on integrating the perspectives of psychology and religious studies in a comprehensive analysis of the development of religious spirituality in two phases of life, namely adulthood and old age.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Development of Religious Spirituality in Adulthood

The development of religious spirituality in adulthood can reflect the changes in life and new responsibilities that individuals often face during this period. It is a time when individuals can begin to explore and deepen their religious and spiritual values in the context of increasingly complex daily life. Adulthood is a period when individuals can develop generativity and a broader, more inclusive worldview. It is a time when they can reflect on their personal and cultural heritage and play a role in creatively expanding their world. Additionally, it is a time when they can deepen their spirituality (Fowler, 1981). During this stage, some changes and roles that can influence the development of religious spirituality include:

1. **Marriage and Family:** Marriage and starting a family are significant changes in adulthood. Individuals may start to contemplate how their religious and spiritual values will influence the dynamics of marriage and child-rearing.
2. **Career and Job Responsibilities:** Many adults focus on their careers and job responsibilities. The development of religious spirituality can be reflected in how they integrate moral and ethical values from their religion into their work context.
3. **Crises and Value Shifts:** Some adults experience crises or upheavals in their religious beliefs, which can trigger a search for meaning and a deeper understanding of religion and spirituality.
4. **Religious Maturity:** In adulthood, individuals may reach a higher level of religious maturity where

they not only follow religious beliefs faithfully but also understand and contemplate the moral meaning and implications of their beliefs.

5. **Participation in Religious Communities:** Many adults are involved in religious communities such as churches, mosques, or temples. They may serve as leaders or active members in these communities.

Changes in the Development of Religious Spirituality in Old Age

An individual's religious experience can undergo significant changes as they enter old age. These changes may include shifts in perspectives on the meaning of life, death, and spiritual understanding. Essentially, humans should not seek the meaning of life but realize that they are being questioned by life itself. In other words, every person is tested by life, and the only way they can respond to life is by taking responsibility for their own lives (Frankl, 1984). Here are some aspects of these changes:

1. **Reflection on the Meaning of Life:** When entering old age, individuals often become more reflective about the meaning of their lives. They may contemplate their achievements and experiences throughout their lives, as well as how religious and spiritual values have guided them in living their lives. This can lead to a deeper understanding of the meaning of life and their existential purpose.
2. **Perspectives on Death:** Religious experiences can also influence how individuals view death. In old age, when death becomes nearer, individuals may be more inclined to reflect on the spiritual aspects of preparing for death. Religion and spirituality can be a source of comfort and hope in facing death.
3. **Participation in Religious Practices:** Some individuals may increase their participation in religious practices as they enter old age. They may attend religious services more frequently and engage in deeper religious rituals.
4. **Value Shifts:** In some cases, individuals may experience shifts in their religious values and beliefs as they age. This can include transitioning from more orthodox beliefs to more inclusive or universal beliefs, or vice versa, depending on their life experiences and reflections.
5. **Seeking Deeper Spirituality:** Upon entering old age, many individuals begin to seek deeper spiritual understanding. They may be interested in meditation, reflection, or more intensive study of religious and spiritual aspects.

Individual Variability

Individual variability in religious experience refers to significant differences among individuals in terms of beliefs, religious practices, and the development of religious spirituality. This is a concept that acknowledges that there is no uniform "religious experience" for all people; this experience is highly influenced by individual factors such as background, life experiences, and personal development.

Some people may undergo dramatic changes in their beliefs and religious practices throughout their lives. They may experience processes of seeking, conversion, or significant spiritual transformation. Meanwhile, others may maintain consistency in their beliefs and religious practices throughout their lives. Therefore, in this context, religion is understood as an individual's feelings, actions, and experiences when they contemplate their relationship with whatever they consider sacred, with explanations that are arbitrary (James, 1902).

Cultural and Traditional Influences

Cultural and religious traditions have a significant impact on the development of an individual's religious spirituality, especially in old age. This is because cultural and religious traditions play a crucial role in shaping an individual's beliefs, values, and religious practices. The religious faith and practices of older adults are strongly influenced by cultural customs, religious beliefs, and spiritual traditions in their communities. These traditions serve as profound sources that guide older adults in difficult situations and

celebrate their beliefs (Turner, 2004). Here are some ways in which culture and religious traditions influence the development of religious spirituality in old age:

1. **Influence of Beliefs and Values:** Culture and religious traditions often serve as the primary sources of an individual's beliefs and values. In old age, individuals may be more inclined to explore and understand the religious and moral values they have learned throughout their lives.
2. **Reinforced Religious Practices:** Religious traditions often guide routine religious practices, such as worship, rituals, and prayers. In old age, individuals may continue to engage in these practices as a significant part of their religious identity.
3. **Understanding of Death and the Afterlife:** Culture and religious traditions can provide distinctive views on death and the afterlife. This can influence how individuals perceive death, as well as their hopes and preparations for it.
4. **Religious Community:** Culture and religious traditions often provide a strong religious community. In old age, individuals may feel more connected to this community and receive social and spiritual support from its members.
5. **Cultural Influence on Religious Interpretation:** Culture can also influence how individuals interpret and practice their religion. Certain cultural elements may stand out in religious observance, such as art, music, and traditional ceremonies.

Integration of Psychology and Religious Studies

The integration of perspectives from psychology and religious studies holds significant importance in understanding the development of religious spirituality. These two fields can provide valuable and comprehensive insights into an individual's religious experience. Psychology helps us understand religious life in a more organized and comprehensive manner by identifying its roots in human nature and tracking its development within individuals (Wulff, 1997). Here are some reasons why this integration is important:

1. **Deeper Understanding:** Psychology helps us understand the mental and emotional processes involved in an individual's religious experience. This includes how religious beliefs shape an individual's thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. In religious studies, we understand the cultural, historical, and theological aspects of religion. This integration provides a deeper understanding of the complexity of religious experience.
2. **Social and Cultural Context:** Religious studies highlight the role of culture and society in the development of religious beliefs. Integration with psychology helps us understand how these factors influence individual development, including how an individual's beliefs and religious practices are influenced by their social and cultural environment.
3. **Influence of Personal Development:** Developmental psychology helps us understand how an individual's personal development, such as cognitive and emotional changes, affects the development of religious spirituality. This includes an understanding of how religious experiences evolve with age.
4. **Psychological Well-being and Mental Health:** The integration between psychology and religious studies is also relevant in the context of mental health and psychological well-being. Some research has shown a positive relationship between religious practices and good mental health. Psychology helps explain the mechanisms behind this relationship, such as social support from religious communities.

Impact on Mental and Physical Health

Religion has a significant influence on the mental and physical health of individuals in adulthood and old age. Participation in religious communities can provide strong social support, reducing levels of stress and depression in adults and older adults. This social support can be a source of comfort and emotional support. Religion often provides meaning and hope in individuals' lives. This can help them cope with crises,

difficulties, or life changes that often occur in adulthood and old age. Belief in the meaning of life and purpose can enhance psychological well-being. Those with strong religious spirituality tend to be more resilient in facing life's challenges. They may have healthier coping strategies, such as better acceptance of situations that cannot be changed.

Positive religious experiences can reduce stress levels. Prolonged stress can have a negative impact on physical health, and reducing stress through religious beliefs can positively affect physical health. Some individuals with strong religious beliefs may be more inclined to lead a healthy lifestyle. They may avoid risky habits such as smoking or excessive alcohol consumption, which can have positive effects on physical health.

Practical Implications

Understanding the development of religious spirituality has various practical implications that can affect various fields, including social welfare services and religious education. The involvement of religion and spirituality in contexts such as mental health and education is rapidly advancing in research and practice. Understanding how these elements influence individuals at different stages of religious development can contribute positively to improving service quality and more adaptive approaches (Paloutzian & Park, 2013).

Religious education should reflect the diversity of religious beliefs. Curricula should be designed to respect various religious traditions and provide an inclusive understanding of various beliefs and practices. Religious educators should understand the stages of religious development of their students. This allows them to teach in a way that is appropriate to the students' level of understanding and spiritual maturity.

CONCLUSION

Adulthood is an important phase for individuals to deepen their spirituality, create a legacy, and contribute to the development of a broader world in the context of the development of religious spirituality. This is so that individuals can answer questions about the meaning of life and live their lives with responsibility, including the spiritual and religious dimensions in old age. Religious experiences are highly individual phenomena and can dramatically differ from one individual to another.

Religious traditions and cultures serve as deep and important sources in an individual's religious experience in old age. The integration of psychology and religious studies allows for a deeper understanding of religious experience. This illustrates the importance of understanding the development of religious spirituality in various professional contexts to enhance responsiveness to individuals at various stages of their religious development. As a beneficial action, it is recommended that professionals in various fields deepen their understanding of the spiritual development of individuals at different stages of their religious growth. This will enable an improvement in responsiveness to the needs of individuals engaged in the process of their religious development.

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