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Religion, Spirituality and Health**

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**Nature as the most important coping strategy among cancer patients**

**A Swedish survey on religious and spiritual coping**



# Introduction

- **Based on the findings of a qualitative study among cancer patients in Sweden (Ahmadi 2006), we have conducted a quantitative survey to examine to what extent the results are applicable to a wider population of cancer patients in Sweden.**

- **In addition to questions relating to the former qualitative study we have also used the RCOPE questionnaire - designed by Kenneth I Pargament in the design of the new quantitative study.**

# Data gathering

- The data was gathered by **SKOP** (see [www.skop.se](http://www.skop.se)), a professional data gathering agency.

- **SKOP used several cancer organisations, among them the Swedish Union for Ileostomy-, Colostomy-, and Urostomy-Operated Persons (ILCO); Blood Cancer Association (Bloodcancerförbundet) in Stockholm; and the Breast Cancer National Organisation (BRO).**

- **Most respondents (61 percent) belong to the BRO's register, a fifth (19 percent) belong to Blood Cancer Association's register, and 20 percent belong to register of ILCO.**

- **The survey was conducted as a postal questionnaire. No reminder letter was sent out. Data collection was conducted from March to May 2011.**



## ***Participants***

- The study sample consists of 2417 cancer patients of whom 79 percent are women and 21 percent are men.**

- **Almost one-third (29 percent) of those who responded to the survey are 59 years of age or younger; even more (38 percent) are between 60 and 69 years of age. One-third (33 percent) are 70 years or older.**

- **As such, the study consists of three age groups: 18–59 years old, 60–69 years old, and 70+ years old. The reason behind this distribution is, that almost a third (29 percent) of those who responded to the survey are 59 years old or younger.**

- **The highest proportion of respondents (38 percent) are aged between 60 and 69 years while one-third (33 percent) are aged 70 or older.**

# **Result**

**Questions which concern the religious coping were focused on the following religious coping methods:**

- To Pray God to make things better**
- To think that you have done your best and now it's only God who controls**

# Definitions

- **In our study we have proceed from the definition of religion and spirituality defined by Ahmadi (2006:71-73). According to her (Ahmadi 2005-71) religiousness is:**

- **A search for significance that unfolds within a traditional sacred context (Ahmadi). It is then related to an organized system of belief and practice relating to a sacred source that includes individual and institutional expressions, serves a variety of purposes, and may play potentially helpful and/or harmful roles in people's lives (Pargament & Jenkins 1995:52)**

- **Spirituality is defined by Ahmadi (2006-71-72) as:**
- **A search for connectedness with a sacred source that is related or not related to God or any religious holy sources (Ahmadi). Spirituality involves efforts to consider metaphysical or transcendent aspects of everyday life as they relate to forces, transcendent and otherwise.**



- **Hence, spirituality encompasses religion as well as many beliefs and practices from outside the normally defined religious sphere (Jenkins & Pargament 1995:52-53).**

- **To think about God or think about the life of Jesus or other religious people's lives**
- **That you have ever had a sense of a strong connection with God**
- **Going to Church**

- **To listen to religious music**
- **To seek spiritual help from a priest or other religious leader**
- **Trying to control your situation without God's help?**

Table 1:  
Percent

When you have felt stressed, sad or depressed during or after your illness, to what extent have the following helped you feel better ?

| June 2011   | Percentage that answers |           |                 |                | Mean | Number of answers |
|---|-------------------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------|------|-------------------|
|   | Not at all (1)          | Small (2) | Quite large (3) | Very large (4) |      |                   |
| Thinking about God or contemplating the life of Jesus or other religious personages?      | 63                      | 20        | 12              | 6              | 1,6  | 2.266             |
| Thinking about a spiritual power?   | 49                      | 23        | 18              | 9              | 1,9  | 2.264             |
| Going to church?  | 64                      | 21        | 10              | 4              | 1,5  | 2.261             |
| Praying?  | 51                      | 20        | 17              | 12             | 1,9  | 2.320             |
| Listening to religious music?   | 65                      | 20        | 11              | 3              | 1,5  | 2.245             |
| Listening to spiritual music?   | 56                      | 23        | 16              | 5              | 1,7  | 2.267             |
| Listening to the "music of Nature" (birdsong and the whistling of the wind)?              | 13                      | 21        | 38              | 28             | 2,1  | 2.335             |
| Going for walks or doing other outdoor activities which give you a sense of spirituality? | 19                      | 18        | 34              | 29             | 2,1  | 2.338             |
| Thinking and contemplating the meaning of life and other things, in solitude?             | 32                      | 36        | 26              | 6              | 2,1  | 2.307             |
| Helping others to experience spirituality?  | 50                      | 28        | 19              | 3              | 1,8  | 2.282             |
| Thinking that you have done your best and the rest is in God's hands?                     | 62                      | 18        | 13              | 7              | 1,6  | 2.310             |
| Praying to God that He will make things better?   | 58                      | 21        | 14              | 6              | 1,7  | 2.302             |
| Trying to control your situation without God's help?                                      | 30                      | 20        | 34              | 15             | 2,3  | 2.283             |
| Trying to stop thinking about your illness by thinking of spiritual matters?              | 64                      | 25        | 9               | 2              | 1,5  | 2.327             |
| Seeking spiritual help from a priest or other religious leaders?                          | 86                      | 9         | 4               | 2              | 1,2  | 2.301             |
| Providing spiritual support to others?  | 77                      | 16        | 6               | 1              | 1,3  | 2.290             |
| Having sometime experienced a   | 66                      | 16        | 12              | 6              | 1,6  | 2.324             |

## ***To Pray God to make things better***

- As the table 1 shows, the factor "To pray God to make things better" is in the thirteenth place (mean = 1.7).**
- A fifth of respondents (20 percent) answered that this factor in a lot or quite a large extent has helped them to feel better when they during or after their sickness.**
- One of twenty (6 percent) corresponds to a large extent and one in five (21 percent) responded marginally.**

- **Nearly three in five (58 percent) have chosen the option “not at all”. People in the oldest age category who are 70 years or older, women and those who bred in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have higher average than younger people, males, and grew up in big towns.**

***To think that you have done your best and now  
it's only God who controls***

- **In the sixteenth place (mean = 1.6) is the factor "To think that you have done your best and now it's only God who is in control" (Table 1).**
- **A fifth of respondents (20 percent) answered that this factor has in a lot or quite a large extent helped them to feel better when during or after their sickness they felt stressed, sad or depressed.**

- **Just over one in twenty (7 percent) responded that the factor has helped them in a large extent and one in six (18 percent) responded marginally.**
- **Just over three in five (62 percent) chose the option “not at all”.**



- **People in the oldest age category who are 70 years or older, women and people grew up in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have higher average than younger people, males, and grew up in big towns.**

***To think about God or think about the life of Jesus or other religious people's lives***

- **At the seventeenth place (mean = 1.6) we find the factor "To think about God or think about the life of Jesus or other religious people's lives" (Table 1).**
- **One sixth of (18 percent) answered that this factor has in very or fairly large extent helped them to feel better during or after their sickness.**

- **One of twenty (6 percent) responded to a large extent and one in five (20 percent) responded marginally. Just over three in five (63 percent) chose the option “not at all”.**
- **People in the oldest age category who are 70 years or older, women and people grew up in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have higher average than younger people, males, and grew up in big towns.**

*That you have ever had a sense of a strong connection  
with God*

- In the eighteenth place (mean = 1.6) is the factor "that you ever had a sense of a strong contact with God" (Table 1).
- One sixth of (18 percent) answered that this factor has in a lot or quite a large extent helped them feel better when during or after their sickness felt stressed, sad or depressed.

- **One of twenty (6 percent) responded “to a large extent” while one in six (16 percent) replied “little”.**
- **Two in three (66 percent) chose the option “not at all”.**
- **People in the oldest age category who are 70 years or older, women and bred in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have higher average than younger people, males, and grew up in big towns.**

# ***Going to Church***

- **In the nineteenth place (mean = 1.5) we find the factor "Going to church" (Table 1).**
- **One-seventh (14 percent) believe that this factor has helped them “in much or pretty much” degree to feel better when during or after their sickness.**
- **A few (4 percent) answered “very large extent”.**

- **One in five (21 percent) replied “marginally”.**
- **Nearly two in three (64 percent) chose the option “not at all”.**
- **People in the oldest age category who are 70 years or older, women and bred in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have higher average than younger people, males, and grew up in big towns.**

## *To listen to religious music*

- In twentieth place (mean = 1.5), the factor "to listen to religious music" (Table 1).
- One-seventh (14 percent) responds that the factor in question has in a lot or quite a large extent helped them feel better when they felt stressed, sad or depressed during or after his sickness.



- **A few (3 percent) replied “to a large extent”. One in five (20 percent) responded “marginally”.**
- **Nearly two in three (65 percent) chose the option “not at all”.**
- **People in the oldest age category who are 70 years or older, women and bred in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have higher average than younger people, males, and grew up in big towns .**

## *To seek spiritual help from a priest or other religious leader*

- In last place (mean = 1.2) stands the factor "that you sought spiritual help from a priest or another religious leader" (Table 1).
- One twentieth (6 percent) replied that they this factor in a lot or quite a large extent have helped them feel better when during or after their sickness felt stressed, sad or depressed.

- **A few (2 percent) answered “to a large extent”, One in ten (9 percent) account small extent. Six of seven (86 percent) chose the option “not at all”. Women have a higher average than men.**

*Trying to get control of your situation directly without the help of  
God  
(Self-Directing Religious Coping)*

- **In fourth place with the fourth highest average (2.3), we find the factor "Trying to get control of your situation directly without the help of God;" (Table 1).**
- **This factor is then reported by the informants of this study as the most important coping strategy after three spiritual methods which will be discussed in another paper.**

- **Half of respondents (49 percent) answered that the factor in a large extent has helped them feel better when during or after his sickness felt stressed, sad or depressed.**
- **One in seven (15 percent) corresponds to a large extent.**

- **One in five (20 percent) respond marginally.**
- **Almost one in three (30 percent) responding with the option at all (Table 1).**
- **People in the youngest age category who are 59 years or younger and women have a higher mean value compared to older people and men .**

# The negative religious coping methods

- *Have you wondered if God has left you or you have been angry that God had not been present to assist you?*
- *Have you ever noticed that God has made sure you had your problems with your health because of your acts or because you have not been sufficiently faithful?*
- *Have you ever noticed that your illness was caused by an evil power?*

***Have you wondered if God has left you or you have been angry that God had not been present to assist you?***

- **As the table 2 shows, only 3 percent of respondents answered that in a quite a large extent has the thought that God has left them or the anger that God had not been present to assist them had helped them feel better when during or after his sickness felt stressed, sad or depressed.**



- **A few (1 percent) corresponds to a large extent; one in ten (9 percent) responded marginally.**
- **Nearly nine in ten (88 percent) chose the option “not at all”.**

- **People in the youngest age category who are 59 years or younger, women and people who grew up in places with 20 000 or fewer residents have a higher mean value compared to older people, men and people who have grown up in larger towns.**

*Have you ever noticed that God has made sure you had your problems with your health because of your acts or because you have not been sufficiently faithful?*

- **Table 2 indicates that only two percent of respondents answered that in a quite a large extent the factor in question has helped them feel better when during or after his sickness felt stressed, sad or depressed.**
- **A small number (less than 1 percent) corresponded “to a large extent”.**

- **Almost one in ten (8 percent) responded marginally.**
- **Nine out of ten (90 percent) answered “not at all”.**
- **We could not find any significant difference between different groups of informants concerning answering to this question.**

*Have you ever noticed that your illness was caused by an evil power?*

- **As the table 2 indicates only 1 percent answered that in a quite large extent this factor has helped them feel better when during or after his sickness felt stressed, sad or depressed.**
- **A small number (less than 1 percent) replied to a large extent.**

- **One in twenty (5 percent) accounted a small extent.**
- **Nineteen of twenty (94 percent) responded “not at all”.**
- **It was not found any significant difference between different groups of informants concerning answering to this question .**

The background is a solid orange color with a pattern of various leaf shapes in a slightly darker shade of orange, scattered across the surface. The leaves are of different sizes and orientations, creating a natural, autumnal feel.

# ○ Nature and coping

## **Nature as the most important coping method**

- The highest mean value (2.9) is the factor 'nature has been an important resource to you so that you could deal with your illnesses'.**



- **Two out of three respondents (68 percent) affirm that this method helped them feel significantly better during or after illness.**

- **Respondents in the younger age category (under 59 years of age) and women have a higher average compared to older persons and men.**

## **listening to “natural music”**

- The second highest average (2.8) is the factor ‘listening to “natural music” (birdsong and the wind).**

- **Two out of three respondents (66 percent) answered that this coping method significantly helped them feel better during illness.**

- **Women and people who grew up in places with 20,000 or fewer residents have higher averages compared to men and those who grew up in larger towns .**

## Activity outdoors

- **The third highest average (2.7) is the factor 'to walk or engage in any activity outdoors gives you a spiritual sense'.**

Three out of five respondents (63 percent) answered that this factor has 'to a very large or quite large extent' helped them feel better when during or after their illness.

- **Three out of five respondents (63 percent) answered that this factor has 'to a very large or quite large extent' helped them feel better when during or after their illness they felt stressed, sad, or depressed. Almost one in three (29 percent) chose the option 'very large extent', and one in six (18 percent) answered 'to a small extent'.**

- **Women belonging to the upper class and those who grew up in places with 20,000 or fewer inhabitants have higher average than, for instance, men who indicated that they do not belong to the upper class and those who grew up in large cities.**



# Final Result

- **This survey concerning the role of nature as the most important coping method for cancer patients confirms the result obtained from the previous qualitative studies.**

- **That as the study indicated not God but nature as a spiritual source was more percent in the picture when people cope in Sweden is more understandable if we take into consideration the result of the world value study .**

- **The WVS statistic concerns the importance of religion. According to the result , for only 10.1 % of people in Sweden religion is very impotent, while for 20.5 % religion is rather important and for 41.5 % religion is not very important and for 27% religion is not all important .**