



Prayer in the acute phase of MI

Prof. Donia Baldacchino

donia.baldacchino@um.edu.mt



DEFINITION

Theistic Definition

- **Theistic religions:**

Prayer is communication with the Absolute in a personal, private manner or in a group (Dossey 1997) fostering a personal relationship with God (Belford Ulanov 1999);

Non-Theistic Definition

- **Non-theistic Eastern religions:**

Prayer is communication and harmony with the sacred/ultimate reality. Thus, prayer is a manifestation of spiritual beliefs.

(Balducci & Meyer 2001)

Religious Orientation



Religious Orientation of Prayer

- **Christians** may communicate with God through Jesus Christ and/or saints using the word 'Lord'.
- **Jewish & Islam religions** communicate directly with God in their prayers (Oxford Dictionary of World Religions 1997).

Influencing factors

- There are various ways of praying, depending upon the inner mode and social context of individuals (Ameling 2000).



Impact of MI

- MI is a life threatening illness with bio-psycho-social & spiritual implications (Grace et al 2005);
- Patients' whole meaning of life is questioned and their life is re-evaluated (Lane et al. 2002);
- Recovery time from MI to the return to normal life is one of uncertainty and emotional turmoil, both for the patient and the relatives (Mayou et al. 2000);
- Patients with MI face both an immediate life-threatening illness and the potential for living with a major chronic illness (Baldacchino 2002).

Prayer & Illness



Prayer & illness

- Positive relationships between prayer and health (physical & mental health, hope, optimism) (Baetz & Toews 2009; Koenig & McCullough 2001);
- Prayer as a healing power is still controversial in research (Poole & Cook 2011);
- Healing experiences are often related to God and holistic impact, not just physical recovery (Teas 2010).

Methodology

- Descriptive Exploratory study (forms part of a larger longitudinal study across the first five years post MI);
- Semi-structured face to face audio-taped interviews on transfer to the medical ward from CCU (acute phase);

Main Questions

- To whom did you turn for help when you felt the severe chest pain?
- What kind of prayers did you say & why?

Theoretical Framework

- Cognitive Theory of Stress & Coping (Lazarus & Folkman 1984);
- The Idea of the Holy : The numinous experience (Otto 1950);
- Spirituality: Dwelling & Seeking (Shults & Sandage 2009)

**Spirituality: Dwelling & Seeking
(Shults & Sandage 2009)**

Harm or loss

Challenge
Positive

Threat
Negative

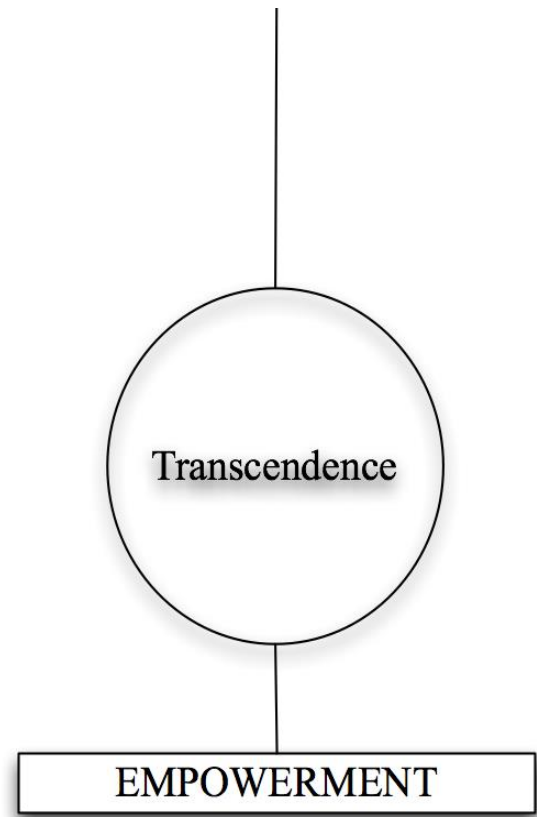
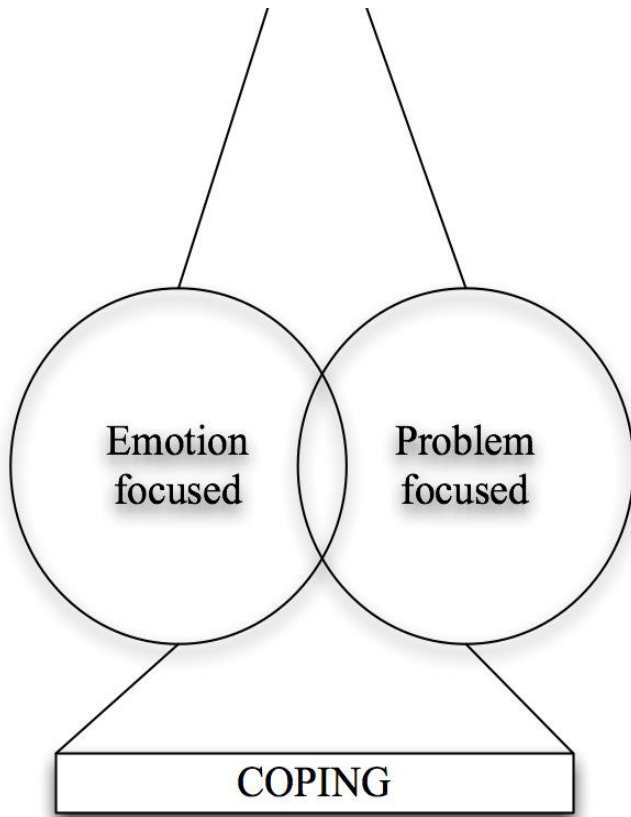
Stress Appraisal
(Lazarus & Folkman 1984)

Mysterium
tremendum

Mysterium
fascinans

HARMONY

Numinous
Experience
(Otto 1950)



Spiritual Well-being

**Spirituality: Dwelling & Seeking
(Shults & Sandage 2009)**

Harm or loss

Challenge
Positive

Threat
Negative

Mysterium
tremendum

Mysterium
fascinans

Stress Appraisal
(Lazarus & Folkman 1984)

HARMONY

Numinous
Experience
(Otto 1950)

Emotion
focused

Problem
focused

Transcendence

COPING

EMPOWERMENT

Spiritual Well-being

**70 patients: 46 males & 24 females ;
40-89 years; Mean age: 61.5 years**

**Use of prayer during the acute phase of MI before
admission to hospital**



Findings : Prayer in the acute stage



Prayer during severe chest pain

- 53% of males (n=18)
84% females (n=16) **prayed** to God, Jesus, Our Lady and saints, such as St Rita, Padre Pio and St George Preca.
- 47% of males (n=16)
16% of females (n=3) **did not pray** during the acute phase of severe chest pain

Used to pray:

but not aware of diagnosis (MI)

(5.1) 'L-ugiegh f'sidri kien insapportabbli.....
Kont magħdur ħafna u kont waħdi d-dar. Fil-waqt ta' l-attakk, lanqas għaddhieli minn moħħi biex nitlob imqarr, *Ġesu' ħenn għalija*, avolja kont fil-bżonn u f'sensija. Ma nafx kif ma ġiniex go moħħi, misteru kbir għalija għax jiena f'ħajti sikwit insibni niddjaloga ma' (M15, 56yrs)

Possible reasons for not praying

- Did not know the meaning of the severe chest pain;
- Expected pain to subside;
- Busy trying to communicate with family members for help;
- Pre-occupied with unfinished business & family commitments;
- Were not used to praying before MI;

Awareness of severity of chest pain

- 91% (n=48) perceived their severe chest pain as **serious + on the point of death**;
- 64% (n=34) did not pray in the acute phase;
- Only 9% (n=5) **did not** consider chest pain as serious,

Chest pain not considered 'serious'

- **(5.2)** 'M'għaddhielix ġo rasi li se mmut. Għax jiena kelli ġo moħħi li min ikun qed imut ikollu nifsu maqtuġħ'. (F01, 51yrs)
- **5.2** I didn't think the attack was life threatening. I always thought that on the point of dying , one is very short of breath. (F1, 51yrs)



**Perceived Loss
of dear ones**

Perceived Loss of dear ones

- **(5.3)** ‘Dak il-ħin ma kontx naf li hu attack tal-qalb għax jiena, fl-eta` żgħira ta’ 46 sena, żgur li qatt m’għaddhieli minn moħħi li kellu jagħtini attack tal-qalb. Dak il-ħin bżajt ħafna, għax qas stajt nifhem x’kien dak l-uġiegħ. Ғsibtni se mmut bl-uġiegħ u bdejt naħseb fit-tfal li se nħalli warajja u l-mara li tant inħobb u hi tirrispettani ħafna.....Le, dak il-ħin ma ġiniex go moħħi li nitlob, forsi għax kont traskurajt naqra dan l-aħħar.... Malajr imurlek il-qżież kollu li jkollok quddiem is-serjeta` tal-mewt!’. (M21, 46yrs)

Loss of dear ones

5.3 At the very start I did not know it was a heart attack. I'm still 44 years old so it never crossed my mind that I could undergo such an attack. I could not understand what I was going through so I was terrible scared. I thought I was going to die and I started thinking about my wife and children whom I adore. No, at that time , I didn't think of praying. Perhaps because I declined my religious practice.....when you face death, all your superiority will vanish. (M21,46yrs)

A sepia-toned photograph of a person in profile, facing right, with their hands raised in a gesture of prayer or supplication. The person's hands are silhouetted against a bright, glowing sun in the sky. The sun is positioned in the upper right quadrant, and its light creates a shimmering reflection on a body of water in the lower right. The overall mood is one of spiritual seeking and hope.

**Turned to God
for help**

Threat of Loss: Prayed to God for help

- **(5.4)** ‘Hassejt dwejjaq kbar ġo sidri, kwazi qas stajt nieħu nifs.... Ma kontx naf li kien attack tal-qalb dak il-ħin. Imma ħassejt li kien serju l-uġiegh..... Waqt l-attack, ħsibtni se mmut, tatni rasi bl-uġiegh qawwi u nfexxejt nitlob, *Ġesu’ ħu ħsiebi*. (M03, 67yrs)

5.4 I felt sense of uneasiness in my chest, I could hardly breathe. At the time I didn't realise I was suffering a heart attack, although I knew it was something serious. On feeling that intense pain during the attack I panicked and started to pray, "Jesus please take care of me!"

(M3,67yrs)

Interpretation: Past experiences

- **(5.5)** ‘Bżajt ħafna, għax peress li d-daddy miet ta’ 45 sena b’attakk tal-qalb, bżajt li dak l-uġiegh ma kienx sempliciment indigizzjoni kif kien qed jassumi r-raġel.... Ħassejtha ħafna li jiena kont daqshekk muġugħa u t-tfal kienu reqdin, ma jafux x’inhu jigri.....*(crying)*. M’għandhomx tort imsieken, ma qajjimnihomx! Ħassejtni mifruda minnhom dak il-ħin u għidt li ma kontx se narahom aktar. Bdejt nitlob, lejl sħiħ! *Ġesu` , għinni jaħasra. Inti taf x’għandi bżonn... (crying)*’.
(F32, 40yrs)

5.5 I was very much afraid, because since my father died at 45 due to heart attack, I was afraid that the same would happen to me. At that time with the pain I had, I wished God would take me because I could not tolerate that pain. I felt it very much, that I was in so much pain and the children were asleep, not knowing what was happening. It was not their fault poor things, I did not wake them up. I felt separated from them at that time and I said to myself, 'I am not going to see them any more!' I prayed all night, "Jesus please help me, You know what I need" (*crying*). (F32,40yrs)

Fear of abandonment from God



Fear of abandonment from God

- (5.7) 'Hsibtني li se mmut u bzajt ghax hassejtni abbandunata dak il-hin, anke minn Alla x'wahda din! Hsibtني li se ninfired minn mal-familja għażiża tiegħi. Għaliya l-familja tigi l-ewwel u qabel kollox.....Iva, qbadt ir-ritratt tal-qalb ta' Ġesu` u rassejtu ma' qalbi u tlabtu jhenn għaliya, *Ġesu` hu hsiebi, inti f'dan l-ugiegh, taffili dan l-ugiegh'*. (F25, 55yrs)

5.7 I thought I was going to die and felt abandoned even by God. I thought that I was going to be deprived from my family which I treasure. For me , the family is the first priority....Yes, I took hold of the holy picture of the Sacred Heart, prayed Him to have mercy on me. Please Jesus, relieve me of this pain!!

(F25,55yrs)

Triggers of Prayer

- Appraised chest pain as severe & point of death;
- Fear of Death;
- Aloneness (n=38);

Findings



Types of Prayer

- 1. Intercessory prayer for self & others**
- 2. Thanksgiving to God**
- 3. Requesting forgiveness from God**
- 4. Alignment with the will of God**



1a.
Intercessory
prayer for SELF

1a. Intercessory prayer for SELF

- **(5.8)** ‘Dak il-ħin kelli biża’ kbir. Bżajt li kont se mmut u nħalli warajja lil marti, li tant hija għażiża għalija. Ħassejt li kienet xi ħaġa serja. Għidt ser nibqa’ hawn tal-post! Dak il-ħin tlabtu iva lil Alla, għidtlu, *Jekk jista’ jkun aħfirhieli. F’idejk jiena!* Tlabtu wkoll li ma jkollix bżonn is-CABG (Coronary Artery Bypass Graft) bħal ma kellu bżonn ħija. Milli jidher semgħani għax il-professur qalli li m’għandix bżonnha. Nirringrazzja ’l Alla kull ħin u kull mument’. (M10, 51yrs)

1a. Intercessory prayer for SELF

5.8 I was really afraid that I was going to die, leaving my wife, who is very dear to me, all on her own. I knew that whatever it was, was quite serious. I was sure I was going to die there and then. At that moment I did pray to God, “Please don’t let me die. I’m in Your hands”. I prayed that I wouldn’t need the CABG, as my brother did. It seems my prayers were answered, as there was need for it. I thank God continuously. (M10,51yrs)

Prayer for God's companionship

(5.9) 'Hassejtni se mmut.... Kelli *some unfinished business*.... Tatni rasi dak il-ħin bl-affarijiet *pending* li kelli ġo moħħi..... Xtaqt li kieku lestejthom qabel ma nagħlaq għajnejja..... Iva, bdejt nitlob lil Madonna biex tghinni u tlabt lil Ġesu`, *nitolbok ħenn għalija, la tabbandunanix*'. (M52, 64yrs)

Prayer for God's companionship

- 5.9 I felt like dying. I had some unfinished business. I felt panic stricken, because I had many things pending in my mind, I would have liked to finish them before I die. Yes, I started to pray to Our Lady to help me and prayed to God, "Don't leave me!" (M52,64yrs)

Altruism

- **(5.10)** ‘Ħsibtli li se mmut. Ħsibt li lanqas kont se nasal id-dar almenu.....Qalbi riedet tinqasam, sew bl-uġiegh ta’ l-attakk kif ukoll bin-naqra nkwiet li għandi tan-nepputija. Irrid nieħu ħsiebha miskinina..... Allura bżajt li se mmut u nħalliha warajja tissielet mal-problemi weħidha..... iva, tlabt lil Madonna tal-Karmnu biex tgħini f’dak l-uġiegh u ssalvali ħajti’.

(M11, 67yrs)

Altruism

5.10 I thought I was going to die. I didn't think I would even reach home. But, thank God, I even made it to hospital. My heart was aching, partly due to the attack and partly because of the troubles I'm having with my niece. I have to take care of her, poor child I feared that I was going to die and leave her to struggle with this problem on her own. Yes, I prayed to Our Lady of Carmel to help me, relieving pain and save my life. (M11,67yrs)

1b: Intercessory prayer for others



Praying for self & family

- **(5.11)** ‘*Ħsibtني se mmut b’dak l-ugiegh li kelli. Imma jiena tlabt ħafna’l Alla, Ġesu` ħu ħsiebi u l-familja tiegħi. Tlabt ukoll lill-Madonna tal-Kuncizzjoni, biex tghini fil-mument ta’ tbatija li kont għaddejja minnu’.* (F#3, 65yrs)

Praying for self & family

5.11 I felt I was going to die. Yes, I prayed to God. “Jesus take care of me and my family’. Every time I felt the pain, I prayed for myself and my family. I prayed to the Immaculate Conception to help me in this hour of need.

(F#3,65yrs)

Praying for self & family

(5.12) ‘Kien ugiegħ kbir ġo sidri, ugiegħ ikrah, li rajt il-mewt quddiem wiċċi. Dak il-ħin bżajt li mmut. X’waħda din, kemm hi kerha l-mewt. Niftakar li tlabt lill-Madonna biex tidhol għalija hi quddiem Alla u tiegħu ħsieb il-mara li hi ukoll għamlet il-*bypass*’. (M07,60yrs)

Praying for self & family

5.12 An immense pain in my chest, a shocking pain, I saw death before me. Death is terrible. I was afraid that I was going to die. I remember praying to the Madonna , to intercede for me in front of God. I prayed for myself and for my wife who had undergone CABG. (M07,60yrs)



Prayer

Thanksgiving to God

Thanks & forgiveness

(5.13) 'Dak l-ugiegh ma kienx tas-soltu.....
Waqt l-attakk tlabt lill- Madonna, *Madonna*
tieghi, henn għalija inti jaħasra.... Grazzi Sinjur
Alla u aħfirli Sinjur Alla. Sinjur kun għalija
Salvatur'. (F62, 82yrs)

Thanks & forgiveness

5.13 That pain was unusual..... I prayed to Our Lady so, “my dear Madonna have mercy on me. Thank you Lord and forgive me Lord, O Lord be my saviour” I repeated these prayers until I found myself in hospital. (F62,82yrs)

Grazzi Sinjur Alla u ahfirli Sinjur Alla (S.G.Preca)

- **(5.14)** ‘Hassibni hafna dak l-ugiegħ u hsibtni se nitlaq. Ngħidlek il-verita’, qabadni naqra biza` mhux ħażin li se mmut. Għidtlu lir-Redentur, *Dnubieti kollha tafhom, ahfirli dnubieti ta’ ħajti kollha u serraħni minn dan l-ugiegħ..... Grazzi Sinjur Alla u ahfirli Sinjur Alla’.* (F36, 77yrs)

Thankyou O Lord & forgive me O Lord
(S.G.Preca)

5.14 The pain worried me greatly and I feared I would die. I was so scared that I prayed the Redeemer. “You know all my sins please forgive me all my faults and help me with this pain.....
Thank you Lord and forgive me. (F36,77yrs)

**Asking
forgiveness
from God**



Forgiveness :

Promising a healthy lifestyle

(5.15) ‘Waqt l-uġiegh bżajt ħafna u ħsibtني se nibqa’ sejra..... Għibt quddiem għajnejja kemm kont kattiva tiegħi nnifsi għax naf li dan kollu jien għibtu b’idejja. Suppost li kont nieħu l-Asperina, imma ma kontx neħodha regolari. Traskurajt...Ma kontx nieħu ħsieb tiegħi nnifsi. Lanqas iz-zokkor ma kont niċċekkja.... Bqajt nixrob u npejjep...xejn, *total abandonment!*..... Dak il-ħin tlabt lill- Madonna tad-Duluri u lil Santa Rita, *Ħennu għalija, ħennu għalija, aħfirli Sinjur Alla, nwegħdek li nibdel ħajti!*

(F53, 57yrs)

Forgiveness :

Promising a healthy lifestyle

5.15 During the attack, I was very afraid and I thought that I was going to die.... I realised how careless I was, because I knew that this was all my fault. I had to take Asperin, but I did not take it regularly. I was careless and I know, yes that this attack was all due to my fault. I did not take care of myself. I did not even check my blood sugar, nothing , total abondonship..... At that moment I prayed to Our Lady of the Sorrows and St. Rita, “ have mercy on me. I promise you to change my lifestyle”. (F53,57yrs)

Forgiveness from God

- **(5.16)** ‘Kont rieqed bil-lejl. Qajjimni l-ugiegh..... Mal-ewwel indunajt li għandi attakk tal-qalb..... Bdejt nitlobha, *Madonna, xi ġrali! Ħenn għalija. Tini cans inqerr.* Jiena devot ħafna tal-Madonna’. (M42, 77yrs)

Forgiveness from God

5.16 I was in bed at night. I felt acute pain in my chest. I concluded immediately that it was a heart attack. During the attack I thought of God and Our Lady. I started saying, “Our lady what has happened to me? Have mercy on me. Give me the opportunity to confess” I am a devotee of Our Lady.

(M42,77yrs)



4. Alignment with the will of God

4. Alignment with the will of God

(5.17) *‘Bzajt, għidt, tgħidli qalbi se mmut hawn. Miskina se nħalli lil marti warajja.....Allura tlabt fis-skiet u ħassejtni nintelaq fir-rieda tiegħu..... Qalb ta’ Ġesu` jiena nafda fik. Verġni Marija, idħol għalija’.*
(M17, 74yrs)

4. Alignment with the will of God

5.17 I was afraid, I thought I was going to die and that I was going to leave my dear wife behind me. I prayed in silence and felt I should entrust myself into His hands. “Sacred heart of Jesus, in you I trust” “Oh Virgin Mary, please intercede for me” (M17,74yrs)

Praying for God's companionship

(5.19) 'Kont waħdi waqt dak l-uġiegh. #a ngħidha kif inhi, #sibtni li kont qed immut..... Iva, bdejt nitlob lil Ġesu` u lill- Madonna, *Jekk jiena ġejja #dejk Mulej, nitlobok Madonna, zommli jdejja f'idejk u #udni inti #dejn Ġesu`*.
(F33, 70yrs)

Praying for God's companionship

5.19 I was alone at that time. Let us face it, I was terribly afraid that I was going to die. Yes, I started to pray to Jesus and to Our Lady, "if I'm going to come near you, dear God, I pray to you, Mother Mary take my hand in yours and take me yourself near Jesus.

(F53,70yrs)



‘My soul longs
to find refuge in
you oh Lord. I
shall find peace
in you alone’.
(St Augustine)

Reflection : Time to pray

(5.20) Is-soltu jiena nitlob ta' sikwit. Imma waqt dak l-uġiegh, biża' kbir ħakimni....sewwidt ħafna qalbi b'dak l-uġiegh, ħsibtني se mmut. Le, dak il-ħin ma tlabtx. *Il-lum taf x'ngħid, jekk trid titlob, meta tkun b'saħħtek trid titlob.....'* (M59, 73yrs)



Reflection: Time to pray!

5.20 I was frightened
I was very sad in that
severe pain. I thought I
was going to die. I
usually pray but I didn't
then . No at that time I
did not pray. Today I tell
you that one must pray
when he's healthy.
(M59, 73yrs)



Recommendations



Recommendations

1. Integration of religion/spirituality in health care professionals education programmes;
2. Attention to prayer as a coping mechanism during assessment of clients' needs;
3. Facilitation of quiet time for prayers in hospitals/clinics;
4. Further cross-cultural longitudinal research on impact of prayer on individuals with various illness;

Theistic Reflection

Don't think of the
things you didn't get after
praying.

Think of the countless blessings
God gave you without
asking.

Thanks!



Greetings from Malta!