Within the social scientific study of religion, there has been a significant amount of research on spirituality, especially in the area of health and well-being. Despite this, the term spirituality remains poorly defined and understood. There have been only a few small studies that have examined the semantics of spirituality. The aim of the present study was to examine the understandings of the word spirituality among a sample of 233 university students in the UK. Building upon work by La Cour (2012), which produced a list of 156 words and phrases on spirituality, we present here findings from a study of the responses received from a larger, more diverse, and more representative sample of 119 people. The findings provide new insights into the understanding of spirituality and the way in which the term is used in everyday language. These insights are important for understanding the relationship between spirituality and health and well-being, and for developing more effective health interventions.

Introduction

Little has been undertaken into the semantics of the term “spirituality”. Keller et al. (2013) discuss that the study of conceptualised spirituality within the field of religion is important, but states that equality is to know what the general public understands by the term “religion”. The general public understands by the term “religion” as a concept and spiritual religious. The language of spirituality in common use, however, may include religious language, and is co-opted in the context of Western cultures. Therefore, the present study aimed to investigate how spirituality is defined in the UK. Within this context, our study aimed to understand the way in which the term is used in everyday language. This study was conducted in the context of a larger study that examined the understandings of the word spirituality among a sample of 233 university students in the UK. The results of this study were used to inform the development of a questionnaire to be used in a larger study of the understandings of the word spirituality among a sample of 119 people. The aim of this study was to examine the understanding of spirituality and the way in which the term is used in everyday language. These insights are important for understanding the relationship between spirituality and health and well-being, and for developing more effective health interventions.

Results and Discussion

Understanding of Spirituality

The mean of X-marked words was 21.4 (SD = 15.5) with a range of 0 to 71. Of the list of 119 words, the 8 most popular important meanings of the word spirituality given by the respondents were: ① “peace” (71.7%); ② “meaning in life” (68.7%); ③ “healing” (57.7%); ④ “fourth dimension” (53.7%); ⑤ “wisdom” (52.7%); ⑥ “meaning to develop” (50.7%); ⑦ “meditation” (49.7%); ⑧ “love” (48%); ⑨ “opportunity” (40%). The following items received no endorsement from the sample: “coinage”, “material goods”, “money”, and “superficial person”. These findings are largely consistent with those of La Cour et al. (2012).

Understanding of Spirituality and Relation to Gender and Age

To investigate the factors that the six factors were distributed across gender and age, a score for each factor was computed. With respect to gender, an independent samples T-Test was undertaken, and demonstrated that males and females only differed significantly with respect to Factor 1 “spirituality as affective” (Males = 59.3, SD = 7.6; Females: m = 6.3, SD = 2.8, t (40) = 4.0, p < .001). This correlation analysis demonstrated that there were no statistically significant relationships with age. The results regarding gender are consistent with the La Cour et al. (2012); however, the absence of any relationship with age goes against the findings of La Cour et al. (2012) where it was demonstrated that older individuals were more negatively related to the three factors.

Factor-quotient Correlations

Product Moment Correlations were calculated between each of the six factor scores. Moderate positive correlations were demonstrated between spirituality as affective, spirituality as meaning, and spirituality as meaning and spirituality as meaning. Significant positive correlations were found between the embodied experience of spirituality and the affective experience of spirituality. These findings are largely consistent with those of La Cour et al. (2012).

Conclusion

The present study examined the understandings of the word spirituality among a sample of university students in the UK. The results provide evidence that among the present sample there was a divergence of common understanding of the term spirituality, which has important implications for research, policy, and practice. The findings in this study are supportive of those of La Cour et al. (2012) in Denmark, and Keller et al. (2013) in Germany and the USA. Future research should seek to examine the understandings of the word spirituality among other cross-cultural samples.

Table 1: Pearson’s Correlation between the computed factor-quotients of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Spirituality as affective</th>
<th>Spirituality as meaning</th>
<th>Spirituality as meaning</th>
<th>Spirituality as meaning</th>
<th>Spirituality as meaning</th>
<th>Spirituality as meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Factor 1</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.35</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factor 2</td>
<td>-0.21</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>-0.13</td>
<td>-0.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 3</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factor 4</td>
<td>0.33</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factor 5</td>
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<td>-0.13</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.48</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.46</td>
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<tr>
<td>Factor 6</td>
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<td>-0.14</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: * = p<.05; ** = p<.01; *** = p<.001

References


