

Finding Solace in the Silence: How Spirituality Shapes Loneliness Among Caregivers of the Elderly

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Abstract:

Loneliness is a common experience among older people. The increasing trend of “the elderly taking care of the elderly” warrants attention to the caregivers’ needs. It has been indicated that spirituality may be associated with loneliness, while limited studies have taken account of the complicated nature of spirituality. Meanwhile, it remains unclear how multiple factors shape the levels of spirituality and loneliness. This study aimed to clarify the relationship between spirituality and loneliness. The interaction effect of religion and education on spirituality and the interaction effect of age and caregiving on loneliness were examined. Cross-sectional data from 244 Hong Kong people was collected. Most of them were aged 40 or above years old (97.95%), and half of them were caregivers (50.82%). The results showed that only personal and communal spirituality negatively affected loneliness ($\beta=-0.42$, $p<0.01$). Education had significant effects on the personal and communal ($F=2.85$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.06$) and environmental ($F=3.88$, $p<0.01$, $\eta^2=0.08$) spirituality. Education and religion had an interaction effect on the transcendental spirituality ($F=2.63$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.05$) and overall spirituality ($F=2.35$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.05$). In addition, age and caregiving had an interaction effect on loneliness ($F=2.80$, $p<0.05$, $\eta^2=0.03$). These results suggest that not all domains of spirituality equally affect loneliness. The levels of spirituality and loneliness may be shaped by multiple factors at the same time.