Development and Testing Theoretical Models of the Religion-Health Connection

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Overview

• Religion-health connection
• Mechanisms/mediators
• Role of qualitative foundations
• Testing theoretical models
• Implications
Religion-Health Connection

• Religious involvement is often found to be positively associated with health
  – Cognitions
  – Behaviors
  – Outcomes
• However some studies find negative associations
• Or no association at all
Why the connection?

• Mechanisms of the religion-health connection (mediators of the effect)
Proposed Mechanisms

Intrapersonal factors:

• Positive affect
• Coping with stress
• Positive self-perceptions
Proposed Mechanisms

Interpersonal factors:
• Social support
• Social influence/social norms
• Spiritual capital
  – Based on social capital
  – Involves relationships with faith community and those with higher power
  – Need to distinguish construct from soc. support
Proposed Mechanisms

Faith-based factors:

• Scriptural influence on health behavior (health lifestyle)*
• Illness as punishment/guilt*
• Sense of meaning
• Spiritual health locus of control

Qualitative Foundations

• In-depth semi-structured interviews with African Americans from 7 midwestern churches
• Questions about things that impact health and role of religion in health and illness
• Data analyzed using open coding method

Qualitative Foundations

Religion-health mechanisms identified:
- Spiritual health locus of control
- Coping (health and non-health)
- Positive affect/mental health
- Healthy lifestyle
- Sense of meaning
- Social support

Qualitative Foundations

Religion-health mechanisms identified:
• Participants did not feel that religion played negative role in health

Qualitative Foundations

Additional themes identified (things we were not looking for but found anyway):

• Mental health impacts physical health
• Support received from church family
• Body as a temple
• Sickness as a message
• Walkign the talk

Qualitative Foundations

Additional themes identified (things we were not looking for but found anyway):

• Religion brings inner peace
• Giving problems up to God
• Spiritual health
• Worry and stress lead to health problems
• Faith gives hope
• Body, mind, & spirit

Theory Development

• Qualitative findings and literature used to develop theoretical model of religion-health connection
Theory Testing

- Probability-based sample of 2,500 African Americans age 21 and older who have not had cancer
- 45-minute telephone interview
- Currently underway
Cancer Coping Study

• Aim: to understand the role, if any, of religious involvement and spirituality in coping with a cancer diagnosis
  – Phase 1: qualitative, semi-structured interviews with 30 patients
  – Phase 2: quantitative, structured telephone interviews with 100 patients
Qualitative Foundations

Major themes:

• God helps one through cancer
• God works as a healer, directly and/or through doctors
• Role of faith/belief in healing
• Prayer

Qualitative Foundations

Major themes:
• Affective response
• Social support
• Control beliefs
• Meaning-making

Qualitative Foundations

Major themes - spirituality:

• Connections with God (relationship with, relying on, seeking his presence)
• Connections with Others (family members, friends, church family, other patients, treatment team)

Qualitative Foundations

Major themes - spirituality:

• Connections with Self (self-understanding, self-love, new perspective, negative connections)

• Connections with World (helping, giving, volunteering, sharing one’s story)

Theory Development

• Qualitative findings and literature used to develop theoretical model of religious involvement and spirituality in cancer coping
Connections to God:
- Closer relationship
- Relationship improved in coping
- Rely on & converse with God
- Seek God’s presence

Connections to Others:
- Family
- Friends
- Church family
- Other cancer patients
- Treatment team

Connections to Self:
- Increased self-understanding
- Increased self-honesty
- Becoming a better person
- Increased self-love
- New perspective

Connections - negative:
- Issues with spouse - stress
- Family members - meddling
- Friends - abandonment

Connections to World:
- Helping others
- Giving to charity
- Helping others with cancer
- Share story

Survivorship:
- Coping
- Quality of life
Current Status

• Theory development:
  – Cancer risk, prevention, screening behaviors:
    • Data collection ongoing
  – Cancer coping:
    • Data collected, analysis ongoing
Future Steps
Future Steps

• Continue to develop and test theory in religion-health research and use it to guide future studies

• Begin to conduct more longitudinal studies in this area

• Continue to expand and refine measures of religious involvement for use in health research
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