

Hemodialysis and spirituality: exploring spiritual expectations of hemodialysis patients in a University Dialysis Center

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Background & Goal

Previous American studies suggest that dialysis patients want dialysis caregivers to discuss spirituality and mobilize appropriate spiritual resources. Whether this also applies to the Swiss dialysis population, and whether patients' spiritual experiences contribute to their coping mechanisms is unknown.

The goal of this pilot study was therefore to explore the spiritual expectations of hemodialysis patients in a Swiss Dialysis Center. We also explored the impact of the COVID-19 epidemic on their spiritual practices.



Methods & Design

An experienced sociologist (SM) conducted 20 qualitative, semi-structured interviews with dialysis patients of the University Hospital of Lausanne between January 2022 and June 2022. Questions were based on the SPIR and HOPE interview guides^{1,2} (examples on the right side).

Interviews were recorded at home, at hospital in a dedicated room, or during the dialysis session.

All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and then coded and analyzed with Atlas.ti software.

Among the inclusion criteria were: patients aged ≥ 18 years, on hemodialysis for at least one month, French speaker.

Results

The study was proposed to 28 patients, 20 accepted to participate. Clinical characteristics are shown in the table and pie chart.

Main results:

- The majority (75%) consider that spirituality can play a positive role to preserve hope and to manage the difficulties caused by the disease.
- Only 25% of believers would appreciate support of a spiritual nature from dialysis caregivers.
- The majority of those who have spiritual practices wish to keep it private.
- Their relationship to spirituality has generally not been significantly impacted by their changing health status, or the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The most frequently mentioned needs are related to social dimensions (isolation, loneliness, need to talk, financial problems).

Conclusion

The majority of Swiss dialysis patients did not express the wish to discuss more often spiritual issues with dialysis caregivers, but they would appreciate more attention for social and socio-economic difficulties.

Definitions:

Religion= institutionally organized beliefs and activities of a particular faith.

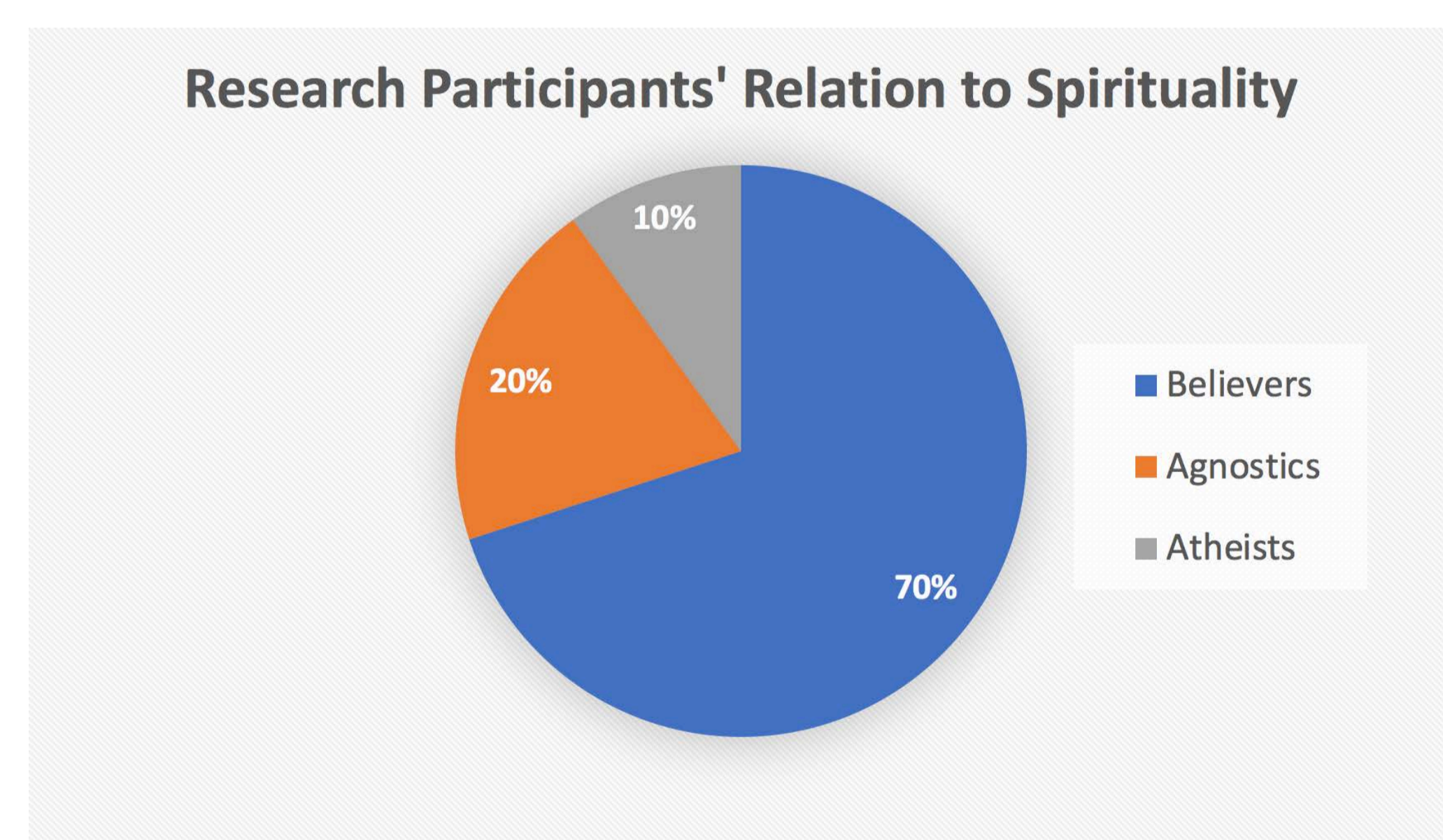
Spirituality= a way in which people find purpose in life, illness and death.

Questions (examples)

- Do you have any spirituality, religion, belief or interest in broader essential issues?
- What place does this take in your life ?
- What helps you in times of hardship?
- Are you part of a group that shares your beliefs?
- Does your actual state of health influence your spirituality?
- Would you like caregivers to pay more attention to your spirituality?
- How did you experience the lockdown during the COVID-19 pandemic?
- Did the COVID-19 pandemic influence your spirituality?

Clinical and spiritual characteristics of participants

Clinical characteristics	
Sex (% female)	40
Mean age (min-max)	62.5 (30-86)
Vascular acces (% AV fistula)	90
Dialysis vintage, years (min-max)	5.5 (1-39)
Dialysis sessions/week (min-max)	2.9 (2-3)



Interview Quotations

"You know, dialysis, you're hanging on by a thread. If the thread is cut, you don't have long to live. And that makes you think..."

"It's not fun to come to dialysis 3x/week, but I'm alive, and am lucky I can do it. There is a God who helps us."

"The first years, I said: why me? Then I said; there is worse than this, some people have cancer."

«I have an illness that can kill me any day. Do you really think I'm afraid of COVID? I've known worse than that.»

References: ¹ Anandarajah G. & Hight E. (2001), *American Family Physician*, 63(1), p. 81-88 ² Borneman, Puchalski, J of Pain and Symptom Management, 2010, p 163-73.

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