

The effect of mixed prayer and positive psychology group therapy on life meaning and death anxiety among elderly women with physical-motor disabilities

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Abstract

Background and Objective: Aging and disability are two phenomena that occur in all human societies, and more than half of the world's elderly population are women, most of whom live in developing countries. Some studies have shown that spirituality plays a part in reducing the psychological problems and anxieties among the elderly. The goal of present study was to examine the effect of prayer and positive psychology group therapy on life meaning and death anxiety among elderly women with physical-motor disabilities who live in the nursing center of Tafresh.

Method: This study adopted a quasi-experimental design including a pretest and a posttest as well as an experimental and a control group. Thirty elderly females with physical-motor disabilities were selected from the nursing center of Tafresh, Arak province in 2016. Data were collected by administering the meaning of life questionnaire (MLQ) and test anxiety of death (DAS) before and after the intervention. Analysis of covariance (ANVOCA) was used for data analysis. All ethical issues were observed in this study and the authors declared no conflict of interests.

Results: Comparing the pretest and posttest conditions, significant differences were observed in the meaning of life and death anxiety overall mean scores of elderly women with physical-motor disabilities ($P < 0/05$).

Conclusion: The results showed that mixed prayer and positive psychology group therapy increased the meaning of life and reduced death anxiety in elderly women.

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Summary

Background and Objective: Aging is a universal process that begins with sprouting and continues for the rest of life. All living creatures experience old age (1). Nowadays, the increasing population of the elderly has become a major challenge for the society affecting all economic, social, and health-related dimensions. According to estimations, a significant rise will occur in the population of the elderly over the next two decades. Aging is the results of improved life conditions, better health and treatment cares, longevity, and life expectancy (2,3). One of the psychological problems that the old people may face is lack of meaning in life. Psychological and physical changes at the end of life and death proximity are factors that

make the elderly believe life is meaningless (7). Meaningless life leads to psychological disorders such as depression, severe isolation, lack of interest in life, and severe anxiety in dealing with the reality of death (8). Death anxiety is an exaggerated and abnormal form of anxiety, which entails strong fear of life termination (9). Religion and spirituality constitute a major factor used to treat psychological and psychiatric disorders. Some research studies have indicated the efficiency of spiritual and religious treatment in overcoming depression, suicidal thoughts, anxiety, and drug abuse (10). Furthermore, the results of a study have displayed that people with stronger religious beliefs will have access to more powerful sources of calmness, hope, and meaning in life (11). In fact, considering religious rituals, prayer has a special place in all religions. It is a bridge connecting individuals to the creators. This connection enhances individuals'

psychological quality, hence they will have more calmness and internal assurance. They are therefore stronger and more likely to resist problems in life problems (12). Positive psychology is a common effective therapeutic procedure for reducing death anxiety and enhancing meaning of life. Proposing the notion of successful aging, psychological health experts have utilized positive psychology to help the elderly overcome their problems and do not feel any inferiority (5). One of the problems of aging population is reduction of meaning of life and increase of death anxiety. Furthermore, in addition to medical procedures, it is important to use non-medical procedures and psychological interventions (e.g. prayer and positive psychology) to improve the effectiveness of elderly treatment. Therefore, spiritual and religious treatments should be localized and mixed with psychological procedures that are in line with the Iranian-Islamic culture of Iran. Therefore, the current study aimed to examine the effect of prayer and positive psychology group therapy on life meaning and death anxiety among elderly women with physical-motor disabilities who live in the nursing center of Tafresh.

Method: A quasi-experimental, pretest-posttest design was adopted in this study, with a treatment and a control group. The statistical population included 75 elderly women with physical-motor disabilities who lived in the Banu Nasibeh nursing center of Tafresh, Arak, in 2016. In total, 30 women who met the inclusion criteria were selected through convenience sampling. After receiving written consent from them, the participants were randomly assigned to either of the treatment or control groups, with both groups having an equal number of elderly women. That is, all the participants attended an orientation session in which they were introduced to the Meaning of Life Questionnaire (MLQ) and Death Anxiety Survey (DAS). Demographic information was also collected in this session and informed written consent was obtained. The participants in the treatment group were exposed to 10 sessions (one hour a week) of prayer and positive psychology. The collected data were analyzed using analysis of covariance (ANCOVA).

Results: The results of ANCOVA showed that there was a significant difference between the treatment and control groups in the death anxiety posttest ($F=76.185$, $P<0.001$). Furthermore, the eta coefficient of the effect of prayer and positive psychology on death anxiety reduction was 0.73. In addition, there was a statistically measurable difference between the two groups in terms of meaning of life posttest ($F=5.003$, $P<0.001$). These results indicate the effectiveness of prayer and positive psychology on enhancing meaning of life among the elderly ladies with physical-motor disabilities living in Banu Nasibeh nursing center. Thus, the second research hypothesis is confirmed.

Conclusion: The majority of the studies that have indicated the effectiveness of prayer have been conducted among clinical groups and other social classes. For example, Morgan demonstrated that

meaning-based psychological intervention reduces depression among the elderly. Furthermore, he showed that meaning-based treatment will create happy and hopeful memories for the elderly if they are based on here-and-now phenomena rather than there-and-then ones (13,14). The results of another study showed that meaning-based treatment along with reciting verses of the Quran was beneficial in overcoming depression (15,16). Prayer and positive psychology create purpose and coherence in life and make the elderly aware of spiritual values, hence enhancing hope and dynamism among them. In such a situation, the elderly will give more meaning and purpose to life; thus, they not only feel calm inside, but also accept mortality and are able to deal with death anxiety more properly. Prayer gives a sense of connection to the creator, a feeling that individuals may not experience will interacting with others in life. It is a highly individual and private feeling, leading to heightened patience in life (11,12). The current study suffers from some limitations; first, no follow-up data collection procedure was pursued to examine the long-term effect of treatments. Additionally, convenience sampling was used for selecting the participants, which negatively affects the generalizability of the findings. Finally, the study only focused on elderly women with physical-motor disabilities in Banu Nasibeh nursing center of Tafresh. It is suggested that future studies examine the effect of prayer and positive psychology on other psychological factors like self-concept, self-esteem, and personal sense of value. Furthermore, this mixed intervention can be utilized while treating other clinical groups.

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