

**Culturally Relevant Research in Social Work: Working with Older People, Spirituality,
and Religion**

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Introduction

Culturally competent research and practice are crucial in social work to provide equal services to all the communities. Spirituality and religion are two important sources of meaning, coping, and social support for older adults. However, traditional research approaches may not capture the cultural importance of these aspects in their lives. This paper aims to review three research articles that focus on the relationship between aging, spirituality, and religion and their implications for cultural competence in social work. In this paper, the principles of Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (ADEI) are applied to the context of working with older adults to ensure that the approach is socially just, culturally sensitive, and empowering.

Elements of Culturally Relevant Research in Social Work

Culturally competent research in social work focuses on the culture, beliefs, and practices of the people in the society. It uses involvement of the target group, sample selection, and culturally appropriate measures to enhance the validity and to respect the studied population. These principles are reflected in the three selected studies by focusing on the religious and spiritual aspects of older adults and their well-being.

Study 1: Spiritual Coping and Mental Health in Older Adults

This study aims at identifying the ways in which older people employ spiritual coping styles in dealing with depression and anxiety. The research method involves conducting interviews with older adults of different religious affiliations. The study employs culturally relevant research by: Employing the qualitative research approach that enables the participants to tell their own stories. Understanding the differences in religious beliefs and spiritual practices. Using interviewers who are culturally sensitive and aware of the participants' religious beliefs (Oxhandler et al., 2021).

Study 2: The Role of Faith-Based Organizations in Supporting Older Adults

This paper aims at exploring the role of religious organizations in offering support to the elderly. The researchers interact with faith-based community leaders and participants, and use both qualitative and quantitative research. Key culturally relevant elements include: Recognizing religious institutions as important social support systems. Engaging community stakeholders in the research process. Challenges that older adults experience in accessing religious and spiritual support.

Study 3: Spirituality and End-of-Life Care Preferences in Older Adults

This study aims at exploring the role of spirituality in decision making at the end of life. Surveys and focus groups are carried out with older adults of different religious affiliations. The study demonstrates the following aspects of culturally appropriate research: Examining various attitudes towards death, dying and the hereafter. Engaging faith leaders and caregivers in the conversation. Spiritual diversity in healthcare planning.

Key Differences Between Traditional and Culturally Relevant Research

Traditional research methods use a set of procedures that may not capture cultural differences in perceptions and experiences. In contrast, culturally relevant research: It uses a technique of purposive sampling that ensures that all the different groups in the population are included. Uses cultural anthropology and qualitative research techniques that are sensitive to cultural differences. Works with the community members to ensure that data is collected in a manner that is sensitive and appropriate. Acknowledges the concept of intersectionality, meaning how race, ethnicity, and socio-economic status influence the world (Jimenez et al., 2022).

The studies discussed in the paper reveal the shortcomings of the conventional methods, which can fail to capture the importance of spirituality and religion in the lives of older people.

These studies are more culturally sensitive because they incorporate culturally appropriate research methods, which offer a better understanding of the role of spirituality in mental health, social support, and end-of-life care.

Promoting Social Justice through Cultural Practice and Research

Social justice receives benefits from culturally relevant research which specifically studies spiritual and religious elements of senior adults in social service programs. This can be achieved by: Organizations must adopt faith-based policies which will be implemented within long-term care centers as well as healthcare facilities. The organization supports interfaith programs which deliver community-based services for senior citizens (Kurata, 2024). The process requires researcher and participant engagement so senior citizens can have direct access to policy creation opportunities. These strategies function to solve barriers which stop older adults from obtaining suitable cultural service options in their community.

Collaborative Practice and Advocacy for Appropriate Services

Social workers should work in partnership with religious organizations together with health care facilities and other organizations in order to support older adults. This can be done through: Collaborative models of spiritual care in health and social care settings. Cultural sensitivity and spirituality in the education of social workers (Schmid & Sheikhzadegan, 2022). The delivery of appropriate interventions which make sure to include older adults' cultural beliefs in their foundation. So social workers should contact faith-based organizations together with community networks to deliver services which meet both cultural preferences and spiritual needs of older adults.

The ADEI Lens in Working with Older Adults

ADEI serves social work practice with older adults by establishing discriminatory-free services that protect clients from oppression. ADEI principles help: BComplete the process of spiritual care delivery to all minority populations. The social services need to eliminate religious prejudice and age-based prejudice. The formulation of policies which affect older adults must have their active participation. Implementation of ADEI principles within research alongside practice enables social workers to enhance spiritual and religious self-representation of older adults (Shdaimah & Fuld, 2025).

References

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