

**„ALEXANDRU IOAN CUZA” UNIVERSITY, IAȘI
FACULTY OF PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATIONAL
SCIENCES**

**Religiosity and religious coping in couple and family
relations. Therapeutical implications**

- Summary of the thesis-

SCIENTIFIC COORDINATOR

PROF. PHD. MARIA NICOLETA TURLIUC

PHD. STUDENT

JURAVLE PETRUȚA PARASCHIVA (RUSU)

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1.Theoretical background

1.1 Introduction and research problem

Religion plays an important role in the lives of many people, religious principles, religious values and religious beliefs influencing all aspects of their lives. Also, the families and couples' life is shaped by their beliefs and their spiritual and religious beliefs, which may have effects on the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral level. The family system can be positively or negatively affected by spirituality and religion; religion can be a foundation of intimacy within the family system, but on the other hand, religious issues might cause conflicts and increase anxiety in relationships.

In the scientific literature there are offered different explanations about the psychological implications of religiosity.

Diener and Diener (1998) present a range of active ingredients for happiness, which are all linked to religion: *encouraging beliefs* (the belief in life after death), *social support* from the religious community, *the connection with something permanent and important* (religion has its own history, is shared by many people, it gives meaning to life), *religious education* (bringing up a child with religious beliefs and attending church are associated with happiness, even if that child will not be a religious person when adult; people who have grown up in a religious environment have a positive outlook upon the world, feel more secure, religious households offer more harmony, stability and intimacy than the non-religious ones), *religious rituals* (religious services, sounds, icons make the religious experience more profound).

Baumeister (1991) considers that religion provides answers to questions about the meaning of life, having the capacity to meet all four peoples' needs for meaning: 1) provides a life's *purpose* (salvation), 2) satisfies the *need for value* (human motivation to feel that his actions are correct, good and justifiable) by offering supreme criteria to determine what is right and what is wrong in life, 3) meets *the need for a sense of self-efficacy* (need to control events - prayer can be an effective way of obtaining practical benefits), 4) religion offers *self-worth* through membership in a religious community.

A number of studies in couple and family psychology attempts to explain the processes and mechanisms by which religiosity influences the quality and stability of the relationship between partners. Brody, Stoneman, Fluor & McCrary (1994) emphasize that it is very useful for religious variables to be assessed and included in models of marital functionality. In a study analyzing the ways in which religion influences marriage, Marks (2005) shows that religious convictions influence marriage through three channels: 1. religious convictions discourage divorce; 2. sharing the same religious convictions by the spouses makes them have similar views on family life; 3. faith in God protects marriage and represents the support that helps couples overcome difficult situations. In another research, Lambert and Dollahite (2008) argue that the inclusion of God in marriage leads to stable and enhanced marital involvement.

Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott Emery & Rye (1999) developed the sanctification of marriage theory (the psychological process by which aspects of marriage are seen as having spiritual significance). Ellison, Henderson, Glenn & Harkrider (2011) show that sanctification of marriage mediates the relationship between religiosity and marital quality and moderates the relationship between stress and marital quality.

Taking into account the results of research conducted in other religions, we consider that the investigation of the role of religiosity in couple and family relationships for people of Orthodox religion is a major line of research.

1.2 Relevance of the research

In the current thesis, we intend to analyze the mechanisms by which religiosity influences the family life of the Romanians, and to analyze the ways of integrating religiosity and religious coping in therapy.

The main arguments supporting the need to study the subject proposed in our work are:

1. Studying the psychological implications of religiosity has become a topic of increasing interest in research;
2. Increased religiosity of Romanians;
3. Lack of research on religiosity and family functionality on the Romanian Orthodox population;

4. Importance of integrating religiosity and religious coping in couple and family therapy.

Given the arguments presented above, we believe that studies at the intersection of psychology of religion and couple and family psychology are absolutely necessary in the Romanian context.

1.3 Summary of theoretical chapters of the thesis

In the first part of the thesis we made an analysis of the scientific literature regarding the constructs evaluated in the research we have conducted: religiosity, family stress, individual and dyadic coping strategies, religious and non-religious coping strategies used by partners in stressful situations. We presented an overview of the studies that show the influence of religiosity on family relationships, the influence of dyadic stress and coping on family functionality, the role of religiosity and religious coping in adaptation to family stress and the integration of religiosity and religious coping in couples and family therapy.

The thesis is structured into four chapters, the first three chapters present the theoretical foundations of the work, and the last chapter covers the research.

In **Chapter 1** we analyzed the concept of religiosity from the perspective of the main psychological theories and models and we presented the implications of religiosity on family functionality.

In this chapter we presented a number of definitions of religiosity, we made the distinction between religiosity and spirituality and we emphasized the psychological implications of religiosity and religious dimensions according to the most important theories and models from the scientific literature (Theory of religious orientation - Allport, 1967 The multidimensional model of religiosity - Wulff, 1997, The hierarchical model of religiosity - Tsang & McCullough, 2003).

Also, in the first chapter we analyzed the main theoretical and psychometrical considerations regarding the measurement of religiosity, emphasizing consideration of cultural and religious differences for the accurate assessment of religiosity. Regarding the influence of religiosity on family functionality we shown the role of religiosity on marital satisfaction and marital stability, and the implications of religiosity in different stages of family life (the formation of family relations, the maintaining of family relationships and the transformation of family relationships in stressful situations).

We analyzed the explanatory mechanisms of the relationship between religiosity and family functionality identified by the most important researchers in the field: sanctification of marriage and forgiveness. In the last part of this chapter we presented some important aspects of research on the role of religiosity in family life, including measuring religiosity based on several indicators, and studying the role of religiosity in families of different religions.

Chapter 2 of the thesis presents a systematization of the scientific literature on family stress, family coping (dyadic coping and religious coping), the relationship between family stress, dyadic coping and family functionality and the implications of religiosity and religious coping on family functionality. There are presented in this chapter the main theories of family stress (ABC-X model of family crisis - Hill, 1949, The Double ABC-X model of family stress and adaptation - McCubbin & Patterson, 1982, Family Adjustment and Adaptation Response, McCubbin & Patterson, 1983, The vulnerability-stress-adaptation model (VSA) - Karney & Bradbury, 1995, The stress-divorce model - Bodenmann, 2005, Process Model of Couple Stress Management - Lavee, 2012) and dyadic coping (Dyadic coping as interaction between individual coping strategies of each partner - Barbarin, 1985, Revenson, 1994, Social-contextual model of coping with everyday problems - Berg, Meegan & Deviney, 1998, The systemic-transactional perspective on dyadic coping - Bodenmann, 2005).

There are particularly presented The stress-divorce model and The systemic-transactional perspective on dyadic coping (Bodenmann, 2005) because these models are the background of our applied research. Also, in chapter 2 is presented a review of the researches regarding the influence of family stress and dyadic coping on marital functionality, is analyzed the concept of religious coping and the role of religiosity and religious coping in adaptation to family stress and religious resources of recovery from family crises .

Chapter 3 analyzes the ways of integrating religiosity and religious coping in psychotherapy in general and in couple and family psychotherapy in particular. In this chapter we addressed issues related to scientific validation of religion based on psychotherapy in terms of criteria for evaluating psychotherapy research results. Also in chapter 3 we analyzed a series of principles and ethical standards on the integration of spirituality and religion into couple and family psychotherapy, referring to the Code of deontology for the profession of psychologist, elaborated by the Romanian College of Psychologists and the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy Code of ethics. We presented aspects of professional integrity, professional competence and responsibility to clients (the autonomy, the informed consent, the clients' well-being and the disclosure of information) in couple and family therapy context which integrate clients's religiosity and spirituality. In the analysis of

ethical issues, we referred to the manner in which the therapist is reporting on his clients' spirituality and religion, to the techniques used and to the ethical decisions influenced by religious beliefs.

2. The research part of the thesis

Chapter 4 covers the research part of the thesis and is divided into two parts: 1. the development and validation of two questionnaires for the assessment of religiosity and dyadic religious coping and 2. the study of religiosity-family functionality-well-being relationship and the study of the role of religious constructs in adaptation to stress. In the first part of chapter 4 we presented the development and validation on Orthodox Romanian population of two instruments for the assessment of religiosity (The Orthodox Family Religiosity Questionnaire and the Dyadic Religious coping Questionnaire). We also presented the psychometric properties of Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI, Bodenmann, 2007) on the Romanian population.

Our studies were based on a number of *theories and models of religiosity* (Sanctification of marriage theory, Mahoney, Pargament, Jewell, Swank, Scott, E., Emery & Rye, 1999, Hierarchical model of religiosity, Tsang & McCullough, 2003), *explanatory models regarding the role of religiosity in adaptation to stress* (integration of religiosity in The transactional model of stress, the role of religiosity and religious beliefs in primary and secondary appraisals of stress, religion as cognitive schema, Newton & McIntosh, 1999, 2009, 2010, Integration of religiosity in VSA model, Zwingmann, Klein & Bussing, 2011), *theories and models of stress and coping in couples and family* (Stress-divorce model, Bodenmann, 2005, Systemic-transactional perspective on dyadic coping, Bodenmann, 2005).

The general objectives of our research were: 1) the development and validation of assessment tools for religiosity and dyadic religious coping, 2) the analysis of the relationship between religiosity, family functionality and well-being, 3) the study of the implications of religiosity on coping strategies, family functionality and partners' well-being in stressful situations.

2.1 Method

2.1.1 Participants

All studies presented in this paper were realised on a sample of 430 Romanian married people, husband and wife (215 women and 215 men, $M=37,73$ years), people of Christian-Orthodox religion. The participants were between 19 and 63 years old, 213 from urban habitats and 217 from rural habitats. In study 1 (development and validation of The Orthodox Family Religiosity Questionnaire) we used two other samples (a sample consisted of 140 married people of Christian-Orthodox religion, 95 women and 45 men, participants were between 22 and 73 years old, $M= 39,05$ years, 72 people were from rural habitats and 68 from urban habitats and another sample consisted of 120 married people of Christian-Orthodox religion (75 women and 45 men, $M=39,20$), participants were between 21 and 59 years old, 60 people from rural habitats and 60 from urban habitats.

2.1.2 Procedure

Participants from all three samples agreed to participate in the study on a voluntary basis. We used a snowball sampling technique and identified respondents among married university students who then referred us to other respondents. All participants signed a consent form on agreeing to participate. The scales used in the study were translated into Romanian and back translated into English. The back translation procedure showed consistency with the original English version of the scales.

2.1.3 Instruments

Participants completed the following questionnaires: **MSF-Multidimensional Stress Questionnaire for Couples** (Bodenmann, 2007), **The Cognitive Emotion Regulation Questionnaire (CERQ, Garnefski, Kraaij & Spinhoven, 2002, Romanian adaptation, (Perțe, 2010))**, **Brief Measure of Religious Coping (BRCOPE, Pargament, Smith, Koenig & Perez, 1998)**, **Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI, Bodenmann, 2007)**, **The Orthodox Family Religiosity Questionnaire**, **Dyadic Religious coping Questionnaire**, **Spiritual Well Being Scale, (SWBS -Bufford, Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991)**, **Couples-Satisfaction Index (CSI 32, Funk & Rogge, 2007)**, **Manifestation of God (Mahoney, 2003)**, **Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (Plante & Boccaccini, 1997)**, **Balanced Inventory of Desirable Responding (BIDR, Paulhus, 1991)**. To establish the convergent validity of **The Orthodox Family Religiosity Questionnaire** we applied in the validation studies the following tools: **The Religious Faith Questionnaire (Cucos, C-tin, Labăr, 2006)**, **The religious Behavior Questionnaire (Cucos, C-tin, Labăr, 2006)** and **Religious Emphasis Scale (RES, Altemeyer, 1988)**.

2.2 Presentation of studies

In **Study 1** our objective was the development and the validation of The Orthodox Family Religiosity Questionnaire (CRFO). The high fidelity, content validity and convergent validity of the questionnaire recommended it for good measurement of religiosity in Orthodox families. CRFO was applied in 3 studies and perfected over time depending on the results of factor analysis and according to the suggestions of the participants. We believe that the total sample used to validate CRFO (690 participants) is representative, providing high confidence to the data and allowing their generalization.

Study 2 presents the development and the validation of the Dyadic Religious Coping Questionnaire, which contains two subscales: positive dyadic religious coping and negative dyadic religious coping. The concept of dyadic religious coping is proposed by us in this thesis to describe the sharing by both spouses of religious coping strategies in stressful family situations. Exploratory factor analysis indicated that all items proposed to assess positive dyadic religious coping had a high factor loading.

The positive correlation between positive dyadic religious coping and negative dyadic religious coping and the fact that some items, although they have been built to describe negative dyadic religious coping had higher loading on the positive dyadic religious coping factor, suggests that in stressful situations people tend to use not only positive religious coping strategies, but also negative religious coping strategies (eg. could see the problem as a lesson from God). This result can be interpreted from the perspective offered by Pargament (1997), who argues that in stressful situations people reframe the sacred, interpreting the stressful event as a punishment from God for personal sins, but the punishment is seen as deserved and not with bad intent. We then demonstrated in **study 5** the importance of dyadic religious coping in partners' adaptation to stress, positive dyadic religious coping moderating the effect of external stress on family and marital satisfaction and on well-being.

Study 3 presents the psychometric properties for the Romanian version of the Dyadic Coping Inventory (Bodenmann, 2007) providing support for the structure of the inventory proposed by Bodenmann. Given the sample of our study (430 people in eight counties) and application of the Romanian DCI version in both husbands and wives, we believe that the data we obtained can be generalized and the Romanian version of the DCI proposed in this study can be used in the future on Romanian population both in research and in couple and family therapy.

In **Study 4** we analyzed four explanatory mechanisms regarding religiosity-family functionality-well-being relationship and we demonstrated that the sanctification of marriage, individual coping and dyadic coping mediate the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and between religiosity and well-being. Using structural equation modeling, we demonstrated that religiosity influences marital satisfaction and partners' well-being through its influences on sanctification of marriage and coping strategies (cognitive individual coping, positive dyadic coping and negative dyadic coping) in stressful situations. The results indicate that the sanctification of marriage completely mediates the relationship between family religiosity and marital satisfaction and that the sanctification of marriage and marital satisfaction partially mediates the relationship between personal religiosity and well-being. We also showed that coping strategies are an explanatory factor of the relationship between religiosity and marital satisfaction and between religiosity and well-being. Positive dyadic coping and negative dyadic coping mediate the influence of religiosity on marital satisfaction and on the partners' well-being, while individual cognitive adaptive coping and positive dyadic coping mediate the relationship between personal religiosity and marital satisfaction and the relationship between personal religiosity and well-being.

Study 5 validated The dyadic stress model proposed by Bodenmann (2005) demonstrating that internal minor chronic stress mediates the relationship between external minor chronic stress and marital functionality (dyadic coping and marital satisfaction). Moreover, we have shown that the inclusion of religiosity and existential partners' well-being in the model provides further explanation in understanding the relationship between stress-coping-marital satisfaction-partners' well-being. Regarding the moderating effects of various dimensions of religiosity (family religiosity, sanctification of marriage, individual religious coping, dyadic religious coping) on marital satisfaction and partners' well-being, our results can be summarized as follows: 1) the sanctification of marriage and family religiosity moderates the effect of family stress on marital satisfaction and the effect of family stress on partners' well-being, 2) individual positive religious coping moderates only the effect of major external chronic stress (serious illness, unemployment, family-related changes) on marital satisfaction, 3) dyadic positive religious coping moderates the effect of family external stress on marital satisfaction and partners' well-being, 4) sanctification of marriage moderates the effect of chronic financial stress on marital satisfaction and well-being, 5) dyadic coping moderates the relationship between external stress and marital satisfaction.

In **study 6** we demonstrated the mediating role of individual coping and dyadic coping in the relationship between personal religiosity, marital satisfaction and well-being. The

results also indicated that personal religiosity has a positive influence on positive dyadic coping and a negative influence on negative dyadic coping (both for husbands and for wives). We identified gender differences regarding the religiosity-negative dyadic coping relationship and regarding the dyadic coping-marital satisfaction relationship. Thus, the results showed that personal religiosity has a more negative influence on husbands' negative dyadic coping than on wives' negative dyadic coping, and wives' marital satisfaction is significantly influenced by personal positive dyadic coping and by husband's positive dyadic coping (actor-actor effects and actor-partner effects are significant for women) while husbands' marital satisfaction is significantly influenced by personal positive dyadic coping, but not by wife's positive dyadic coping (actor-actor effects are significant for men).

General conclusions

The results of the studies presented in this thesis provide useful information for both scientific research and in terms of integrating religiosity in psychotherapy. This thesis adds information for understanding the explanatory mechanisms regarding the religiosity-family functionality relation and for understanding the relationship between different aspects of family functioning.

Contributions of the researches presented in this paper:

- a) development and validation of The Orthodox Family Religiosity Questionnaire;
- b) development and validation of The Dyadic Religious Coping Questionnaire;
- c) adaptation of Dyadic Coping Inventory (DCI, Bodenmann, 2007) on the Romanian population;
- d) the analysis of the mediating factors in the relationship between religiosity and family functionality (sanctification of marriage, individual coping and dyadic coping);
- e) the study of the moderating effect of religiosity, sanctification of marriage, individual coping and dyadic coping in the relationship of family stress with marital satisfaction and well-being;
- f) the analysis of the influence of external family stress and internal family stress on marital functionality in terms of Dyadic stress model (Bodenmann, 2005);
- g) the validation of the Bodenmann's model of dyadic stress on Romanian population and the extension of this model by including partners' well-being and partners' religiosity;
- h) the investigation of the influences of individual coping strategies and dyadic coping on marital satisfaction and well-being;
- i) the analysis of the influence of religiosity on individual and coping strategies.

The results of the studies presented in this paper have important therapeutical implications. We present a summary of the most relevant therapeutical implications of the results of the studies presented in the paper.

Therapeutical implications of the results obtained:

- a) the results regarding the influence of religiosity and sanctification of marriage on family relations support the importance of integrating partners' religiosity in couple and family therapy;

b) the results regarding the influence of individual cognitive coping on dyadic coping indicate the importance of assessing and addressing in the couple and family therapy of individual coping strategies used by partners and focusing on replacing cognitive maladaptive coping strategies with cognitive adaptive strategies;

c) the positive influence of dyadic coping on family relationships is an argument that supports the need to improve dyadic coping strategies of partners in couple and family therapy.

The importance given to studying the role of religiosity in family relationships in literature and the results of our studies conducted and presented in this thesis encourage us to further continue research on the role of family religiosity on the functionality of the Romanian Orthodox population ; we hope it will be a resource for other Romanian researchers interested in studying the psychological implications of religiosity in general and the implications of religiosity in family life in particular.

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