

THE NECESSITY OF SPIRITUAL REHABILITATION DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC: A CALL FOR ACTION

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To the Editor,
following the outbreak of COVID-19, mental and spiritual disorders have increased among patients due to patients' spiritual beliefs and destiny-oriented attitudes toward disasters. Insufficient spiritual facilities in low-and middle-income countries (LMICs) and the high workload of health care providers, has reduced the possibility of patients spiritual rehabilitation. Treating the patients with mental disorders as well as people affected by COVID-19 without considering their spiritual beliefs can weak the level of their spiritual health and thus, make them more vulnerable to future pandemics.

Disasters, either man-made or natural, raise the stress level and lead to long-term consequences [1]. People affected by COVID-19 are more susceptible to anxiety and depression, compared to healthy people, by 8.3% and 14.6%, respectively. One of the reasons for this difference in the proportion is the lack of psychological support and rehabilitation of the victims [2]. World Health Organization defines rehabilitation as a set of interventions designed to optimize the performance and reduce disability among people suffering from health problems [3]. Post-disaster rehabilitation covers physical, mental, social, economic, and spiritual types. In this line, spiritual rehabilitation comprises the actions that assist individuals or families to use their spiritual beliefs as a source of power, hope, and healing. Among the different aspects of rehabilitation, spiritual rehabilitation has not been considered yet in the disaster research context and it is incorrectly considered as

mental rehabilitation intervention. Belief in religious determinism and destiny is common among some communities when it comes to disasters. Such belief can lead these people to believe in God's will as the source of COVID-19, intending to reveal divine power to the people who have forgotten about god. Research on the attitudes towards disasters showed that most of the affected people believed Tsunami was an Act of God, by which God wants to test human's patience [4]. For the COVID-19 patients who affiliate their illness, I think it is God's punishment or abandoning; then spiritual counseling can be necessary for the rehabilitation of affected communities. Spiritual beliefs of the patients are significant considerations, of which spiritual rehabilitation can be effective for providing spiritual care for COVID-19 patients by clergy is essential [5]. On the other hand, the medical staff, particularly in the LMICs don't have the opportunity of involved in spiritual care; Counseling due to the lack of spiritual facilities and infrastructure in the hospitals as well as struggling with various problems such as lack of resources, high workload, insufficient personal protection equipment and being far from their families. It is necessary to care for spiritual rehabilitation independently along with other aspects of rehabilitation at the time of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important to note that spiritual rehabilitation needs to align with the culture, religious beliefs, and values of the communities. It can then cover all people living in the affected society; including different religious minorities and secular beliefs.

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The people who are affected by the COVID-19 pandemic require spiritual rehabilitation, which needs to be implemented by trained experts in order to prevent patients' susceptibility to the potential psychosocial consequences. The purpose and meaning of life will change forever among individuals who have low spiritual health, making them more susceptible to potential future disasters. Accordingly, the authors have pronounced the necessity of spiritual rehabilitation during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that there is no conflicts of interest.

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