

Positive attitude to religion as the anti-risk factor for infringements of student youth mental health

Pozytywny stosunek do religii jako czynnik przeciwdziałający ryzyku obniżenia stanu zdrowia psychicznego studentów

EUGENIUSZ M. TISHCHENKO ^{1/}, MARINA Y. SURMACH ^{1/}, JERZY T. MARCINKOWSKI ^{2/}, MARCIN WNUK ^{2/}

^{1/} Grodno State Medical University, Belarus

^{2/} Department of Hygiene, Chair of Social Medicine, Poznan University of Medical Sciences, Poland

Wstęp. Zbadano wpływ czynników wiary i religii na zdrowie psychiczne studentów.

Cel. Zbadanie cech wiary i religii jako czynników zdrowia psychicznego studentów uniwersytetu medycznego.

Materiał i metody. Badanie przeprowadzone w listopadzie 2009 objęło 325 studentów Uniwersytetu Medycznego w Grodnie. Wykorzystano kwestionariusz autorski z pytaniami otwartymi.

Wyniki i wnioski. Wiara i religia stanowią ważną część życia studentów. Zdrowie psychiczne studentów jest poddawane presji życia i nauki. Proces przystosowania do trybu studiów u studentów pierwszego roku i rozczarowanie wyborem życiowym u studentów starszych lat wpływa negatywnie na ich zdrowie psychiczne. Wiara i religia pomagają studentom patrzeć na życie z optymizmem, widzieć „światelko w tunelu” w trudnych sytuacjach życiowych – dlatego można je traktować jako czynniki stabilizujące zdrowie psychiczne młodzieży.

Słowa kluczowe: studenci uniwersytetu medycznego, wiara, religia, zdrowie psychiczne

Introduction. Influence of the factors of faith and religion on students' mental health was investigated.

Aim. To reveal peculiarities of faith and religion as factors of mental health of medical university students.

Material & method. The study comprised 325 students of the Grodno State Medical University who answered a specially developed questionnaire with questions of open type. The study was conducted in November of 2009.

Results & Conclusions. Faith and religion take an important place in students' life. Mental health of students is at risk because of the pressure of life and studies. The process of adaptation to training in first-year students and the subsequent disappointment with the chosen course of life in students of older years of training negatively influences their mental health. Faith and religion help students to look at life with optimism, «to see the light in the end of the tunnel» in difficult vital situations – hence, they are factors of stability of mental health of youth.

Key words: students of medical university, faith, religion, mental health

© Hygeia Public Health 2011, 46(2): 289-292

www.h-ph.pl

Nadstawo: 10.12.2010

Zakwalifikowano do druku: 02.05.2011

Adres do korespondencji / Address for correspondence

Professor Eugeniusz Tishchenko

Dean of Medical-Diagnostics Faculty,

e-mail: medsestrgrodno@grsmu.by

Associate Professor Marina Surmach

Chair of Public Health and Public, Health Care, Grodno State

Medical University; Grodno State Medical

University, Gorkogo st, 80, Grodno 230009, Republic of Belarus

e-mail: marina_surmach@mail.ru

Introduction

Interaction of medicine and religion has many forms of display. Practical cooperation of the medical and religious organisations, carrying out of joint scientific conferences and debates has become the attribute of recent years. Deep penetration of religion into the medical sphere concerns, first of all, changes in social norms, internal values of patients and medical workers. The role of cooperation of public health services with church cannot be overestimated in such major

medical-social questions as a struggle against dependence on psychoactive substances [1], spiritual and social support of patients who are dying in hospices, the decision of problems of abortions [2] and other problems of biomedical ethics [3].

According to some information, the relation to faith influences behavior of the person in the health sphere. V. N. Rostovtsev notices that the believing youth are steadier against risk factors of dangerous sexual behavior, sexually transmitted infections [4].

V. N. Rostovtsev also proves that social spirituality defines the dynamics of all kinds of biological and social interactions [5] that prove to be true in the Law of spiritually-demographic determination. I. A. Gundarov (2001) formulated the Law as «with other things being equal, improvement (deterioration) of a spiritual condition of a society is accompanied by decrease (growth) of disease and death rate» [6].

The research conducted in Moscow and the Moscow area (the Cooperation agreement between the Ministry of Health of the Russian Federation and the Moscow Patriarchy of Russian Orthodox Church was signed in 2003) has shown that the surveyed employees recognize the necessity of public health service reforms, the increase of the general culture and spirituality for the medical environment. Approximately 82.5% of the subjects manifested Orthodox faith, 71.8% of physicians revealed themselves as believers, 40% pray at least sometimes. The majority of medical workers positively assess interaction of medicine and religion [7].

The depth of influence of faith on youth's mental well-being and formation of spiritual bases of morals of the future physicians has not yet been studied.

Aim

The research objective is to reveal peculiarities of faith and religion as factors of mental health of medical university students.

Materials and methods

325 medical university students answered a specially developed questionnaire with questions of open type. The study was conducted in November of 2009 and comprised 251 young females and 74 young males aged between 17-24 years.

Results and discussion

The relation to faith and religion

Every third respondent considers themselves as firmly believing persons, two of three are believers, every seventh was at a loss to answer this question, every tenth – a non-believer.

About 70.8% of the medical students profess Orthodox faith, 10% – Catholic, the others profess other creeds (Moslems, Baptists etc.).

Two in five questioned (39%) pray daily and consider that their reference to God is very important, that faith gives their life meaning. Almost half (47%) of the respondents pray 2-3 times a month, the others – more rarely.

Every fifth (21%) of the subjects never felt presence of God. However, half (49%) of the questioned feel daily presence of God, 30% – the majority – sometimes.

Every third respondent answered that they felt love of God directly or through other people.

At the same time, 46% of the subjects, mainly – young men, visit church only on the big holidays, 20% – some times in a year, 19% (basically girls) – 2-3 times a month, 15% – once a week.

Approximately 32% of the respondents find support and self-trust in religion and spirituality the majority of days, 27% – some days, every fifth (22%) – any time, 19% – daily.

Faith is the source of calm resolutely for 45% of the questioned, 41% of the respondents were at a loss to answer, and 14% – answered «not».

Mental health of students

Three in five (59%) of the subjects estimated their mental health as bad within the last month until the moment of survey. An average duration of such condition lasted about 7-10 days. Almost 45% of the respondents often felt nervousness within the last 30 days, and 7% – always. Such feeling arose seldom in 48% of the subjects. Every fourth respondent often felt despondency and hopelessness. Mainly, it was characteristic for girls. Nevertheless, 23% of young men specified that they felt unnecessary and lonely. As a whole, the sensation of deep despondency when nothing brings consolation, at 35% of the students arose often, at 7% of the subjects – was very frequent.

At the same time, every third student answering the question «How frequently did you feel resoluteness within the last year?» specified that it was frequent, more than 15% – moderately frequent. The same share (45%) of the subjects never feel resoluteness. Every fourth feels nervous experience and disappointment in something. Every tenth, on the contrary, feels inspiration and mobility.

At the analysis of answers to the question «Do I always optimistically look into the future?» it was revealed that 65% answered «resolutely yes», «more likely not» – 15%, 20% answered «resolutely not». These 35% of the students who answered negatively consider that affairs never develop the way they want and it always will be like that in the future.

The influence of study at University on mental health of students

Estimating conditions of life, 67% of the surveyed students of the Grodno State Medical University specify that they are good enough, 18% consider life conditions not absolutely good and 15% answered that conditions mismatch their expectations and do not approach their life ideal.

Every third (34%) respondent is afraid of the future, and every fourth (25%) is tested by complete

loneliness. It is characteristic that basically first-year students (fig. 1) are subject to such feelings.

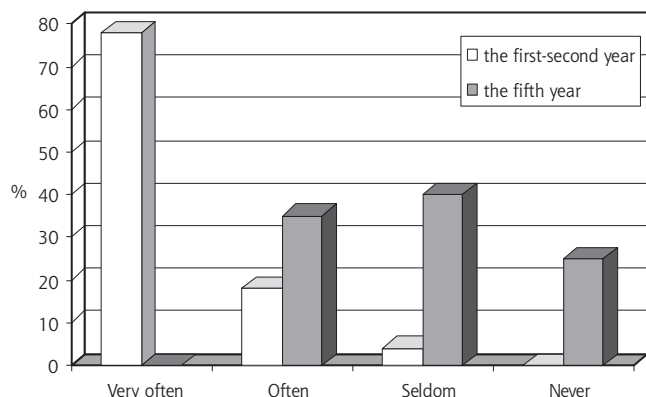


Fig. 1. Occurrence of fear in students of various curricula

In spite of the fact that undergraduates are more assured of themselves and experience fear less often, according to the results of the analysis of answers to the question «Do you feel your life is heading in the right direction?», it is possible to assume that the students' confidence that they have selected a correct course of life decreases with the curriculum increase (table I).

Table I. Self-estimation of life course correctness chosen by students of various curricula

«Do you feel your life is heading in the right direction?»	Curriculum		
	1	2	5
Resolutely „yes”	91%	71%	60%
More likely „not”	9%	25%	32%
Resolutely „not”	-	4%	8%

The attitude to life and difficult vital situations

More than one third (36%) of the respondents have short, middle- and long-term life purposes. Every third student answered that by present time they have reached the purposes put before themselves, 73% are satisfied with life, and only 10% do not agree with it. More than a half (53%) of the students have a positive attitude to life, possess deep internal force, 65% – feel that their life has value. About half (48%) of the students answered «resolutely yes» that they always look optimistically into the future and can see a good sight

of things. Only a quarter of the subjects doubt that good events can happen in their lives. The majority believed that it is possible to see good in bad situations, and 48% believe that every day is a chance.

Each person, appearing in a difficult vital situation, hopes for care, guardianship and love. Answers to the question “Are you able to give and accept love (guardianship)?» appeared as follows: 73% of the medical students answered «resolutely yes», 15% – «more likely not» and 12% – «resolutely not».

The majority, namely 89%, with «resolute yes» have a positive attitude to life. Nevertheless, only 45% can «see the light at the end of the tunnel» when facing serious difficulties. Every fourth student answered this question negatively. About 60% of the students are able to recall happy moments of life. Only 28% of the respondents positively answered the question that if it were possible to live once again, they would not change anything.

Conclusions

According to the results, faith and religion have an important place in a Grodno State Medical University students` lives. The majority of the questioned consider themselves as believers and profess Orthodox creed (every tenth – the Catholic). In spite of the fact that students visit church not so often (only each sixth-seventh of the questioned does it every week), the comparison with the Russian physicians shows that the majority of medical university students in Belarus address God regularly and find spiritual support in religion and faith. It is especially important that, as the study showed, three in five students estimated their mental health within the last month as bad.

The results of the questionnaire data analysis show that mental health of student youth is at risk. The process of adaptation to training in first-year students and the subsequent disappointment with the chosen course of life in students of older years of training negatively influences their mental health. Faith and religion help students to look at life with optimism, «to see the light at the end of the tunnel» in difficult vital situations – hence, they are factors of stability of mental health of youth.

Piśmiennictwo / References

1. Духовные и социальные аспекты профилактики пьянства и алкоголизма среди студенческой молодёжи /священник Кишиштоф Витвицкий, свящ. Александр Сапель и др. Проблемы врачебной этики в современном мире: Тезисы докладов V международной медицинской конференции, Витебск 30 мая 2009 Минск 2009: 75-77.
2. Ермакова ЕН. Нравственный выбор психолога: «культура жизни» и «культура смерти». Проблемы врачебной этики в современном мире: Тезисы докладов V международной медицинской конференции, Витебск 30 мая 2009 Минск 2009: 118-121.
3. Священник А. Шибeko А. Христианское волонтерство как один из методов решения медико-социальных проблем. Проблемы врачебной этики в современном мире: Тезисы докладов V международной медицинской конференции, Витебск 30 мая 2009 Минск 2009: 17-20.
4. Поведенческие риски и нравственные ценности. Ростовцев ВН, Протько НН, Марченкова ИБ. Белорусский медицинский журнал 2005, 1: 81-82.
5. Закон духовно-демографической детерминации. Ростовцев ВН и др. Медицинские новости 2009, 6: 42-44.
6. Гундаров ИА. Пробуждение: пути преодоления демографической катастрофы в России. Фонд национальной и международной безопасности, Центр творчества «Беловодье», М 2001.
7. Черкасова АЕ. Процесс интеграции медицины и религии (по результатам медико-социологического исследования медицинских работников). Черкасова АЕ. Социология медицины 2004, 1: 19-22.