

# SPC



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Spiritual Psychology and Counseling

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**Spirituality in Logotherapy/ Logoterapi'de Maneviyat**  
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**An Integrative Approach to Spirituality Based on Attachment**  
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## Editorial

The second issue of SPC, Volume 2, is readily available once again. As we are getting to our third year in publication as a non-profit, open-access journal, every new issue nurtures our motivation to make it an even better and more beneficial scholarly journal. This issue has five articles that tap into important content areas, as well as the first book review to be published in SPC. It has three original articles and three research articles.

Two of the original articles have similar objectives. The authors make effort to inquire into previously well-established schools of therapy, addressing spirituality from these approaches and pointing out strategies for psychotherapy practitioners. Okan & Ekşi address logotherapy, while Akça-Koca deals with Satir's Family Therapy based on a similar approach.

Two of the research articles deal with death and the closely related phenomenon of loss and grieving. Yukay-Yüksel, Güneş, & Akdağ share their correlational study investigating the relationship of death anxiety and meaning in life among middle-aged adults. Kara presents a qualitative study on university students' religious approaches during the grieving process in her paper. Isgandarova presents another qualitative study, with a considerable amount of literature on the issue of violence towards pregnant women and women in general in the context of Azerbaijan, as well as the role of Islamic teachings in this phenomenon. The book review by Sevgi-Yalın is a neatly written and informative review of a new book by Schroder; it falls within the aim of SPC's journal-content and is deemed applicable to SPC readers.

In the meantime, there have also been other developments regarding SPC. Being cited in scholarly works and having positive feedback from our readers are good signs of acceptance as well as a rewarding experience for the editorial and technical teams that deal with the journal. The journal's availability and recognition has extended further after being included within new content platforms and indexes. SPC is now available on-line through many university e-resources as well as the conventional web. We as the editorial board once again express that we are thankful to the authors, copy editors, our editorial members, and readers who have supported SPC thus far. And we extend our call for researchers and practitioners all over the world to contribute to the scientific literature on spiritual psychology and counseling by publishing in SPC.

Sincerely,  
*Halil Ekşi, Ph.D.*





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Original Article

# Spirituality-Based Analysis of Satir Family Therapy

Dilek Akça Koca<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Spirituality is used in family therapy as well as in individual therapy. Satir's family therapy, which is included under experiential family therapy, began integrating spirituality after the 1980s by using spirituality to enhance congruence, which is the therapeutic aim of Satir's model. While studies on the therapeutic use of spirituality in Turkey have only recently begun, studies on the use of spirituality in family therapy have yet to be encountered. Because spirituality strongly influences all family functions and individuals' mental health, studies need to be performed on this subject. The purpose of this study is to examine the literature on the spiritual orientation of Satir's family therapy. For this purpose, Satir's spiritual approach is first explained, then the relationship between spiritual orientation and Satir family therapy is emphasized. This is followed by an explanation of the orientation using the iceberg metaphor and the self-mandala, finishing with examples of techniques used in therapy that have spiritual content.

## Keywords

Spirituality • Spiritual counseling • Satir family therapy • Spiritually-oriented therapy

## Satir Aile Terapisi'nin Manevi Temelli İncelemesi

### Öz

Maneviyat, bireysel terapilerde kullandığı gibi aile terapilerinde de yer almaya başlamıştır. Yaşantusal Aile Terapisi içerisinde yer alan Satir Aile Terapisi de 1980'lerden sonra maneviyatı terapiye entegre etmeye başlamıştır. Bu entegrasyon, maneviyatın, terapistin Satir modelinin amacı olan 'uyum'u arttırmak için kullanılması ile gerçekleşmiştir. Ülkemizde maneviyatın terapistin kullanımı ile ilgili çalışmaların çok yakın bir zamanda başladığı görülürken maneviyatın aile terapisinde kullanımı ile ilgili çalışmalara ise hiç rastlanmamıştır. Maneviyat, ailelerin tüm fonksiyonlarını ve bireylerin zihinsel sağlığını güçlü bir biçimde etkilediğinden konuyla ilgili yapılacak çalışmalara ihtiyaç vardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, Satir Aile Terapisi'ndeki manevi yönelim hakkındaki literatürü incelemektir. Bu amaçla, öncelikle Satir'in maneviyat yaklaşımı anlatılmış, ardından manevi yönelim ve Satir Aile Terapisi arasındaki bağlantı üzerinde durulmuş ve bu yönelim 'buzdağı metaforu' ve 'benlik mandalası' üzerinden açıklanmış ve en sonunda terapistin kullandığı manevi içerikli teknikler de konuyla ilgili araştırma ve uygulama örnekleri ile beraber incelenmiştir.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Maneviyat • Manevi danışmanlık • Satir aile terapisi • Manevi yönelimli terapi

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The basis of family therapies being considered as a family system dates back to the 1950s. The major family therapies are: psychoanalytical, structural, experiential, strategic, cognitive-behavioral, solution-focused, and narrative. Satir's family therapy, which has made important contributions, is included under experiential family therapy. With its theoretical basis in existentialism, the fundamental issues of experiential family therapy are family's self-realization tendencies, emotions, patterns of communication, self-esteem, and the here and now. These topics are addressed through techniques such as family portraits, family life chronology, communication stances, and family reconstruction (Gladding, 2002; Nystul, 1993).

The family unit is at the center of most religious systems. The great religions of the world, such as Christianity, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Zoroastrianism, attach particular importance to family life. This is because spirituality strongly affects all family functions and individuals' mental health (Griffith & Rotter, 1999). Spirituality is an important activity for creating meaning wherein individuals are generally concerned with the purpose and value of human life, especially their own (Cook & Kelly, 1998). According to Worthington and Aten (2009), spirituality is divided into four parts. The first is religious spirituality, which is known as the feeling of sanctity and affinity defined by a particular religion. Second is the sense of loyalty to humanity, a humanistic spirituality characterized by its proximity to a broader group of people or the ability to care for these people. The third is natural spirituality, which is defined as the sense of amazement at one's beautiful natural scenery and the sense of being connected to nature. The fourth is cosmos spirituality, which manifests as a feeling associated with creation, just as when one thinks about the boundaries of the universe.

Family therapy has recently become spiritually oriented. Prior family therapists have resisted discussing spiritual experiences in their work in order to avoid any conflict with religious counseling and spirituality, which are neglected within the positivist social science paradigm (Bentheim, 2005). If the use of spirituality in family therapy is to be evaluated as a historical process, the first wave (1990-1994) discussed the need to integrate spirituality into family therapy; the second wave (1995-1999) discussed the harm this integration may cause during therapy; the third wave (since 2000) has formed debates on how this integration can work (Helmeke & Bischof, 2007).

As the debate on how to integrate spirituality into family therapy continues, the points spiritually oriented family therapists share are: the role that couples expect sexually from each other in marriage, how to forgive a partner who has made a mistake, how to deal with parenting, and who will provide care for elderly parents. Couples' religious beliefs in particular directly affect these issues, and conflicts arise if couples have different spiritual devotions or faiths. Therapists need to understand

the relativistic effect of their religious beliefs, as each couple who comes to therapy comes with a unique story. Family therapists can produce their own perceptive and behavioral alternatives when a couple enters a dialogue that resonates with their spirituality. When therapeutic methods are consistent with the couple's tradition of beliefs, the therapy environment becomes more familiar and acceptable to them, which yields more positive results (Duba & Watts, 2009).

The aim of Satir's family therapy, which works with families and individuals, is to enhance congruence in the human self and use spirituality as a means to enhance this congruence. According to Woods and Martin (1984), the spiritual orientation of Satir's family therapy, whose philosophical foundation consists of existentialism, gestalt, and humanism, seems closer to humanistic and cosmic spirituality than the spiritual genres described by (Worthington & Aten 2009; Satir, 1988).

Evaluations in the literature outside of Turkey have validated the use of spirituality in family therapy. Because Turkey has had no studies on the use of spirituality in family therapy yet, this study on the spiritual orientation of Satir's family therapy is expected to exemplify the use of spirituality in family therapy for practitioners and researchers in Turkey. For this purpose, Satir's spiritual approach is explained first, followed by emphasis on the relationship between spiritual orientation and Satir's family therapy, with this orientation being explained through the iceberg metaphor and the self-mandala. It finishes with the spiritual content techniques that have been used in therapies.

### **Satir's Spiritual Approach**

Virginia Satir (1916-1988) is one of the leading names in the family therapy movement (Haber, 2002). Born in Wisconsin in the US, Satir graduated from Chicago University with a master's degree in social studies in 1948. In 1951, she had her first family-therapy case. Her success with this case made her believe in the effectiveness of family therapy. In 1964, she published her first book, *Conjoint Family Therapy*. Satir, even in the years following her death, has seen this book stamped as a communicational approach to family therapy. The third edition of the book is still used in classical texts in the field of family therapy (Satir, 1988).

Satir began to integrate spirituality and therapy widely in family therapy after the 1980s. Satir wrote *People making* in 1972 and rewrote it as *The New People making* in 1988, shortly before her death, adding some chapters (i.e., "Human Spirituality" and "World Peace"). Believing man to be a life force coming from all living things, Satir put no name to this life force from which human existence is based, nor did she limit it to any religious tradition. Satir, using a universal spiritual approach, put forth the following arguments on spirituality in the *The New Peoplemaking*:



- i. We are all part of a universal tree that connects people at the roots.
- ii. Spirituality is our connection with the universe and a fundamental element of our existence; therefore it needs to be included in this therapeutic context.
- iii. The growth of plants and animals is the way life becomes energized, a manifestation of the soul manifesting itself.
- iv. The creation of life comes from a much greater force than itself. The challenge of becoming a more complete person is to be open and connected to its many names. This is often called God. A successful life depends on our relationship with this power.
- v. Crushing the soul, freezing the body and the mind.
- vi. The individual is a reflection of the ethical and moral ideals of one's spiritual character.
- vii. The essence of spirituality has us realize we are spiritual beings in human form. It shows how we practice our spiritual self and how we value life.
- viii. Thanks to our intuition, we are connected to universal consciousness. These intuitions can be developed with meditation, worship, relaxation techniques, awareness, high self-esteem, and respect for life. This is a spiritual approach (Satir, 1988).

According to Satir's understanding, physical dependence on spirituality is perfectly hidden in the human seed. When the sperm and egg are combined, the seed is completed and a human is created. Eggs and sperm are the reservoirs waiting to meet wonderfully when they are in their own right. Essentially, seeds and birth are a spiritual phenomenon. When the eggs and sperm are combined, a fantastic event takes place. Strong energy is released and a new person begins to move towards this world. This person is a unique, non-replicated, unprecedented person. It is very difficult to imagine how this tiny embryo can become a large, complex, and multilateral living being. Moreover, this tiny seed has all the internal systems that make a living, breathing human. Life force not only ensures that seeds develop, but also provides the energies required by each segment (Satir, 1988).

Satir believes that the human soul can be changed. The human spirit, which is basically non-malicious, breaks its connection with the power of life because of the repressions, alienations, and obstacles it faces. Transformation is described as the journey to find this connection again. This profound and constructive change affects all life and helps individuals become more open to themselves, to others, to the world, and to the spiritual dimension of life (Mook, 1997).

Satir emphasized that no one except those who listen to religion speaks of spirituality; even some of them see such spirituality as absolute purity or lack of

clarity. However, this issue is related to the universe, which is the basis of existence and, therefore, directly related to family therapy (Satir, 1988).

Satir, who pursued experimental spirituality in research on family therapy and counselors, has similarities and differences with Ken Wilber, the pioneer of intellectual psychology who integrated spirituality with therapy. While both agree on the divine conception of birth and the difficulties of being socially constrained, Satir thinks that with a more optimistic view, everyone can have a deeper spiritual connection with a positive path. Wilber presented the brilliant integral theory to connect both psychological and spiritual developmental stages in an evolutionary model of human development. However, this model visibly lacks a psychotherapeutic model for healthy relationships, such as group or family therapy, or family and group leadership in spiritual practices. Wilber advocates the necessity of establishing a connection with God (i.e., surrender) to completely extinguish the self. Satir, on the positive side, used a concept of self for herself and others, both universal and spiritual, as well as for humanity (Bentheim, 2009).

Satir's understanding of spirituality resembles Paul Tillich's view. The religious quest of the human is seen as a life based on increased harmony and flow among three fundamental relationships: the self, the other, and the soul (or divine being). The search for religion in Tillich's view is not only spiritual, nor is it only material and historical; it is personal, historical, and spiritual, just as is Satir's view of the quest of the human. Religiosity is a multi-dimensional search aimed at transforming the individual, interpersonal, and spiritual dimensions into interactive and interconnected unity. In Satir's model, harmony is a spiritual process of re-humanization by reconnecting with others, one's own roots and others', and the spiritual essence of nature (Lee, 2001).

The basic spirituality-oriented approach deals with the relationship between a person and God. Satir's family therapy model is thought to be able to shed light on this spiritual orientation. Rather than engage in pathology, sickness, or pain, Satir focuses on healthy living and growth. In the final years of her life, Satir went one step further to address the spiritual dimension of therapeutic intervention and enabled spiritual leaders to discover more possibilities for integration. The therapy model can be perceived as a spiritual model servicing mental health when considering Satir's belief in life force and the mysterious existence of human life (Tam, 2006).

### **Satir Family Therapy and Spiritual Orientation**

Satir family therapy is based on existentialism, gestalt, and humanism. Key concepts in the therapy process come from: the acceptance of Carl Rogers and his sincerity, powerful here and now techniques that resemble Fritz Perls', and Satir's observational genius, and humane, peaceful approach (Woods & Martin, 1984).



The first encounter a therapist has with a family seeking help is very important in Satir family therapy. Satir described the therapist's first meeting with the family members as "souls meeting with souls" (year, p. #). This explains the need to be defenseless in order to create a trusting environment, and the emergence of an energy source to use self-reliance (Hyde, 1988). The therapy process consists of five steps (Carlson et al., 1997):

- i. First, an environment of trust is established with the family. An evaluation process plan is developed to ensure the family's confidence. This is called "link building."
- ii. In the second stage, family members improve their awareness towards the experience. The therapist helps to develop a new awareness of family functions with specific questions or specific techniques. This is called confusion.
- iii. New insights are developed in family members to increase awareness of family dynamics.
- iv. In therapy sessions, new insights are developed toward different behaviors; these are expressed and explained.
- v. Finally, family members are encouraged to use new behaviors outside the therapeutic environment. This is called integration.

The therapy process finishes at the time when: a) self-esteem in each family member is high, not low; b) communication in the family is direct, clear, specific, and honest instead of vague or dishonest; c) family rules are flexible, humane, appropriate, and open to change, not rigid, nonnegotiable, or permanent; d) the family relates to other people and institutions outside of the family when and as they choose, openly and hopefully, not with fear, blame, or placations. At this point the therapeutic goals have been achieved (Mook, 1997).

Two important concepts in Satir's family therapy model are the iceberg metaphor and the self-mandala. As these explain the spiritual orientation of the human being, they are explained in detail below.

**The iceberg metaphor and its spiritual orientation.** The multi-layered metaphor of how human beings in Satir's model work contains the spiritual direction of the model. Spiritually oriented therapists may find this metaphor useful in discovering the meaning of spiritual experience. Satir uses an iceberg metaphor to capture many aspects of humanity. Satir tells that, like icebergs, individuals show only part of themselves, and that most experiences lie beneath the surface. To know one's true self, one must enter the sub-conscious and go through many hidden parts.

Satir's metaphor of the iceberg for the self is portrayed as a seven-stage sense of self that provides access to the spiritual world and includes the concepts of: self, yearnings, expectations, perceptions and beliefs, feelings, feelings about feelings, and communication stances (Satir, Banmen, Gerber, & Gomori, 1991).

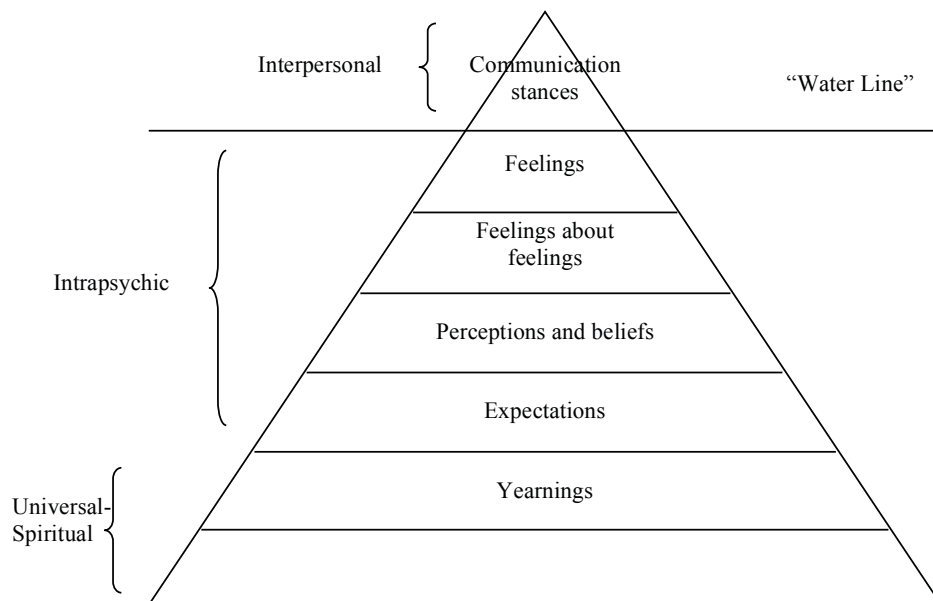


Figure 1. Iceberg: The three dimensions of Satir's model (Satir et al., 1991, as cited in Lee, 2002, p. 64).

The iceberg is Satir's main metaphor for showing the various layers that make up a human. In this metaphor, a person is seen as a multi-dimensional system. A system is defined as a set of actions, reactions, and interactions between a set of basic variables that develop an order and sequence to produce a result. In other words, a system is a set of interacting dimensions and variables that yields more than the sum of its parts; change to a part or dimension is associated with change in other dimensions. Behavior and communication represent only the tip of the iceberg's whole of the multi-layered personality. Satir's iceberg consists of three dimensions: interpersonal, intrapsychic, and universal spirituality. Being a system, these dimensions are linked in that a change in one element relates to changes in other elements. Congruence is the harmonious interaction of these important dimensions within a person (Satir et al., 1991).

**Interpersonal dimension.** The five communication stances that describe Satir's interpersonal dimension are the most familiar aspect of her model. Satir assumes that the three components of self, other, and context must be represented in order for compatible communication. The four stances of blame, placation, super reasonable, and irrelevant represent an imbalance of self, other, and context in communication.





These communication attitudes are also known as survival stances that children learn in their family systems for gaining love and acceptance. Blame protects one's self-worth at the expense of the other. Placation involves connecting one's self to the other. Super reasonable communication gives no attention to the self or other; it only notices that bindings exist. Irrelevant communication relinquishes the self and other from context. Consistent communication (or straight communication) reflects a match between verbal and non-verbal messages (a congruence of words, emotion, and meaning). Congruence is a conscious-level preference based on the acceptance of self, other, and context (Satir, 1988; Satir et al., 1991).

***Intrapsychic dimension.*** This dimension is an array comprised of internal events and communication behaviors. According to Satir, these inner events include feelings, feelings about feelings, perceptions and beliefs, and expectations. Satir's model is a complementary model that transforms multiple internal variables, such as the perceptions and beliefs, feelings, feelings about feelings, and expectations that impede a person's flow of life energy, and removes these obstacles. Perceptions, feelings, and unmet expectations from the past turn into an awareness that is experientially processed, and new choices are made. When a new perception, feeling, or expectation is added, a new pattern of dominance emerges that allows for greater compromise (Satir et al., 1991). For example, a father who feels reasonable towards his son's excessively high expectations may feel warmer and closer to him. This affects their communication and the son's behavior. Thus, a change in expectations can change feelings and perceptions in the intrapsychic dimension, thus causing a change in the interpersonal dimension (Lee, 2002).

***Universal-spiritual dimension.*** The last two layers of the iceberg (yearnings and what Satir calls the self) constitute the person's universal-spiritual dimension. Yearnings include aspirations that need to be valued and approved. They are universal for humans and reflect basic human needs and desires. To agree with one's aspirations is to acknowledge and approve one's humanity. According to Satir, universality for humans is at the same time a dynamic spiritual connection that she calls the universal life force. When Satir's ideas on spirituality increased in the 1980s, she described congruence as one's own life energy, spirituality, or harmony with God (Banmen & Banmen, 1991; Satir et al., 1991).

***Congruence.*** Congruence is a phenomenon that the three dimensions described above can either facilitate or inhibit. In other words, the interpersonal, intrapsychic, and universal-spiritual dimensions interact. In order to move a system to a higher degree of rest, Satir's therapeutic interventions aim at deep structural change in the sub-dimensions, rather than just changing the surface behaviors of these three dimensions. This involves changing expectations, perceptions, feelings, and acceptance of one's

desires, and reconnecting one's life force or energy. The intent of Satir's model is to integrate elements from the interpersonal, intrapsychic, and universal-spiritual dimensions into a harmonious relationship. In the model, spirituality is used as a means to enhance congruence. The developmental stages of the adaptive structure progressed as follows (Satir et al., 1991):

1. In the 1950s, congruence was about raising awareness and acceptance of emotions and non-reactionary behavior.
2. In the 1960s, congruence was regarded as the integrity, inner-centeredness, and self-acceptance corresponding to high self-esteem.
3. In the 1980s, Satir began to speak more openly of the third level of harmony associated with the field of spirituality and universality in connection with the universal life force' that promotes and creates development in humans and other living things.

Therapists study congruence through personal experience. For example, Wong and Ng (2008) used mixed methods to study the phenomenological world of Satir-oriented Chinese therapists in Singapore in terms of their adaptation experiences. The therapists investigated their own inner-life world of experience, how this harmony is used in psychotherapy, and how therapists can heal it. As a result, a significant relationship was found to exist for general congruence with interpersonal, intrapsychic, and universal-spiritual congruence.

Lee's (2002) study on the use of the iceberg metaphor to measure compliance has been well-noted by practitioners and researchers. Lee developed the Congruence Scale based on the construct of harmonization, which is the aimed-for therapeutic change in Satir's model. Harmonization conceptualizes interpersonal, intrapsychic, and universal-spiritual in three human dimensions: connection, awareness, and openness. Twenty-three of the scale's items cover universal spirituality, some of which are reverse-scored. Examples of these items include the following: My spirituality is connected to the spirit of God or the universe (Item 7). I have a relationship with God (Item 27). I am grateful to be a part of the mystery of the Spirit of Life/Spirit/God (Item 35). I have a positive image of God (Item 43). I am a unique manifestation of God (Item 54).

Ko and Kim (2010) found the Congruence Scale as developed by Lee (2002) who had based it on Satir's development model to be inadequate; they rearranged and improved it. Accordingly, the final form of the scale measures congruence and consists of three dimensions (interpersonal, intrapsychic, and spiritual).



**The self-mandala and its dimensions.** Satir also used a mandala of eight parts covering health to represent the self. These dimensions are not independent of each other; on the contrary, they interact with each other. The segments that correspond to dimensions are explained in terms of the substance and context of Satir's views (see Figure 2; Satir, 1988, 2008).

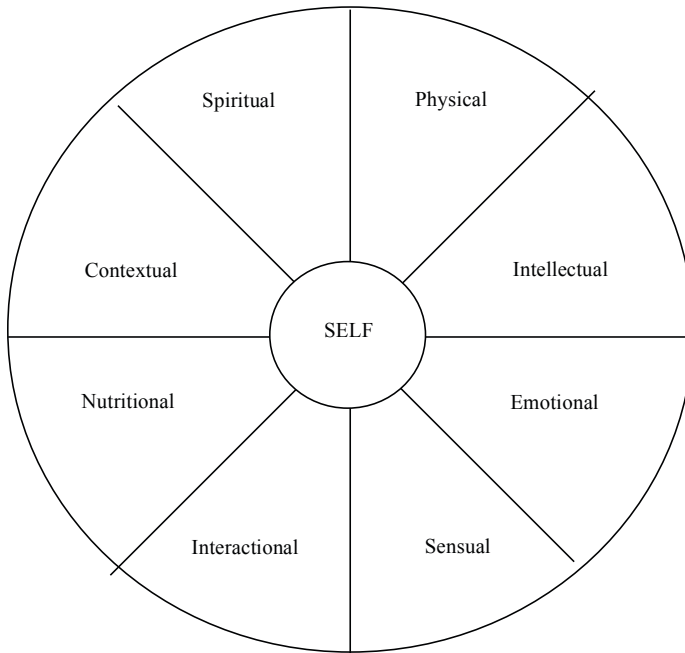


Figure 2. The self-mandala (Satir, 2008, as cited in Pidcocke, 2010, p. 139).

**Spiritual.** This dimension includes the person's relationship with the meaning of life, spirit, spirituality, and life force. In accordance with Satir's spiritual approach, no one has ever created life. Parents do not create life. They only activate life by introducing sperm to the egg, which is a life carrier. What everyone has to face is the existence of a life force that emanates from all living things, and no one plays an active role in creation. This power's name is beyond knowing; it is the foundation of existence. Inevitably, problems arise when conflict, absence, or disorder occur in the individual's spiritual dimension.

**Physical.** This dimension is about the body. The body is a miracle. Who can imagine something like a body and then make it? The idea of loving, appreciating, understanding, and communicating with one's body is just a beginning. Hating, ignoring, or upsetting the body's form can cause different expressions of disturbances and disorders to occur that affect the body, emotions, thoughts, and actions.

**Intellectual.** The left brain covers ideas and events. Our intellect is mostly left brain-based logic center. Its main roles are to make conclusions, produce rules, and accept beliefs scientifically. This is a great tool for handling factual data. When the intellect accepts virtue as an equal partner, it can create all kinds of excitement, discovery, and curiosity for the proprietor. The right brain has always been in the background of science, medicine, and technology. The power of the right brain is deceptive only in the arts. In general, women's left brain functions have been rejected, as if the left brain is unique to men. This has led to many discomforts in male-female relationships.

**Emotional.** The right brain contains feelings and intuitions. The right brain is where one monitors emotions and expresses feelings. Emotions are a means by which life events are experienced; they give life color, texture, and tone. In order to be accepted, people ignore, deny, and distort their feelings in this area. This in turn disturbs people's perceptions and prevents creativity and competence. Emotions are energy. If they are not accepted as is, they take another form. When emotions are rejected, not only does the energy disappear, but disorders also occur such as physical illness, mental confusion, and nervousness.

**Sensory.** Senses include the concepts of hearing (ears), seeing (eyes), smelling (nose), tasting (mouth), and touching (skin); sensations; feeling; and motion. Bodies have great sensory channels. Some people's channels do not work very well because of sense-organ disorders. Sensory channels become dulled by being advised at an early age to "Don't look!", "Don't touch!", and "Don't listen!" As a result, our sensory tools only partially function. In this case, situations and people are not perceived as they are in reality. Instead, sense organs acknowledge how something should be, was, or should have been. This obviously leads to imbalances.

**Interactional.** This dimension covers self-communication and communication between the self and others. Every human is born from two people. This perhaps explains the innate need to establish contact with others. Babies have no way of surviving alone and depend on others for survival. Moreover, they need more than just physical care. Everyone has needs, such as being looked after, loved, and respected by others. This creates an enormous burden on ties with others. Disturbances, imbalances, and conflicts with others, especially with family members, have devastating effects on individuals.

**Nutritional.** This dimension covers the liquids and solids that provide sustenance. The things a body consumes have an effect, and doctors have always recommended special diets for the sick. Special foods or drinks can help a sick body heal. Good nutrition can affect not only the body but also the mind and emotions. Normal and healthy people can be seen to pay better attention to their nutrition.



**Contextual.** This dimension includes colors, sounds, light, air, heat, shapes, movements, space, and time. Because each individual always exists within a context, the light, color, sound, movement, temperature, shape, space, and time of that context have an effect. Contexts that are very cold, hot, boring, fast, crowded, isolated, late, early, quiet, or noisy affect the individual. For example, people now have more hearing weaknesses than before because of being faced with more noise. Also, while some colors promote congruence, others can cause incongruence. Angles and shapes of buildings also have an effect.

**Self in the Spiritual Dimension/Universal Realm.** According to Satir, whether one agrees or not, all people are connected to each other as life manifestations. Humans are represented by the universal existence of sperm and egg and are supported by cosmic spirituality. Similarly, all nations are in contact. The relationships among the nations take the form of a gigantic network through daily fluctuations and the constant energy of five billion souls. The quality of this energy affects the health of the planet, just as the quality of blood and oxygen affects a person's health (Satir, 1988). Satir's views on the spiritual dimension and self-relating are as follows:

As I have been evolving, I have had experiences that tell me that there exists something that could be called the life-force or universal mind. I know that there are many dimensions in this force that are powerful formers of human behavior. It seems to me a little like the presence of electricity. It was always there, yet it waited for someone to identify it, then learn ways to use it for beneficial purposes. This probably could be referred to as psychic power, something all of us have experienced as atmosphere. There are already some ideas that each body is like an individual electrical generating unit. Our energy creator, and the amount and use of its own electrical power, is controlled mainly by belief and feelings of self-worth. I know that when I am in a state of low self-esteem my energy is low and frequently misdirected—mostly against myself. For me, these experiences provide a very fruitful direction in which to go (2008, p. 57).

### **Satir's Family Therapy Techniques and Their Spiritual Orientations**

The techniques used in Satir's family therapy are family life chronology, family reconstruction, family maps, family choreography, family sculpture, family portrait, wheel of influence, multiple families counseling, intuitive and spontaneous movement, touch, intense emotional environment creation, play therapy, art therapy, metaphor, pantomime, role playing, contact attitudes, "I" language, humor, meditation, awareness studies (imagination, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques), the iceberg metaphor, and the self-mandala (Gladding, 2002; Nazli, 2011; Nichols, 2013; Satir, 1988). The techniques of meditation, awareness studies, the iceberg metaphor, and the self-mandala use spirituality as a means of therapy to increase family and individual congruence (Satir, 1988). Below is a description of these spiritual techniques and examples of practice and research in which these techniques are used.

**Meditation.** Satir used metaphors to allow people to follow a different perspective in their inner lives and external preferences; this has also caused change. By meditating at the beginning of training workshops conducted with families and individuals, Satir has thus enabled therapists to easily access their own internal resources. Here is an example of a meditation kit for improving self-esteem as used by Satir in therapy:

The next thing in the kit is a wisdom box. The wisdom box is part of your heritage; it's part of what you came into the world with. For me, I have located it going into my navel two inches and going up toward my heart. Halfway between I find the wisdom box. This wisdom box is in contact with all the wisdom of the universe, all the wisdom of the past, and all that resides within you. It is that part which you sense sometimes giving direction, sometimes called the small still voice. It is that part deep inside that knows and tries to give directions. Like a thought or a feeling, you will not find it on the surgery table. You won't find the wisdom box there, but I don't question the presence of a wisdom box. It is that part of us, when we are cleared of all our defenses and all our fears, in which we can hear the stirrings of our growth and our wisdom. Perhaps our greatest job in life is to remove all that stands between ourselves and our wisdom, and then to recognize that all human beings have a wisdom box. It needs only to be tapped (Nesbitt, 2010, p. 160).

**Awareness studies (imagination, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques).** According to Satir (1988), one can categorize behaviors according to moral and ethical ideals, and unconditionally to our souls. This subject is one of the most important issues of the era. Satir's spirituality is in following the life-force itself in all living things. Here is a focus on Satir's practice in therapies aimed at deepening the spiritual world. This basic exercise of relaxation, breathing, and imagination involves visualizing the energy vertically descending from the sky to meet an energy rising from the earth and then radiating this energy horizontally to all people:

Sit in a chair so your feet can touch. Close your eyes and concentrate on your breath. Now silently go inside and give yourself a message of appreciation that might sound something like this: "I appreciate me." This is to give your spirit strength from your actions. Next, visualize yourself affirming your connection with your creator. Now go deeper inside and locate the place where you keep the treasure known by your name. As you approach this sacred place, notice your resources: your ability to see, hear, touch, taste, and smell; to feel and to think; to move and to speak and to choose... Remember that you have a connection with energy from the heavens, which brings you your intuition, imagination, and inspiration; and the energy from other human beings who are ready to be with you and have you with them. Remind yourself to be free to look at and listen to everything, but to choose only that which fits you. Then you can clearly say yes to those things that fit you and no to the things that don't. You will then be able to do positive things for yourself and others instead of negative things such as fighting. Now again, give yourself permission to breathe (Satir, 1988, p. 339).

Satir believes that humans have a link to achieve universal intelligence and wisdom through, meditation, prayer, relaxation, awareness, self-esteem, and respect for life. There are successful examples of research in the field of meditation and awareness studies.



Dawson (2008), a pediatric therapist for mothers of children who had died from serious illness, conducted a survey to gather a spiritual resource that provides hope and healing for these parents. The research used the pre-test/posttest method. Preliminary observations were collected by visiting the children's hospital. Parents said in the pre-test that they had low spirituality and that it had been the worst time of their lives. The results showed the source of hope and healing to be a successful intervention in alleviating the losses that parents had experienced when their child was severely ill. The presence of God brings hope and comfort to mourning parents. Hope and healing are developed through prayers, poems, and meditations. This resource respects different beliefs and acts through the parents' own religious belief system. The hospital where the research was conducted has religious traditions that represent Christianity, Judaism, Islam, and Hinduism. The psychological basis of hope and healing is founded on Satir's views on spirituality as a life force, Bowlby's attachment theory, and Bowen's family system theory (Dawson, 2008).

Ruhl's (2013) qualitative study of the experiences of patients in family groups using spiritual content techniques such as meditation and awareness studies revealed ideas to better understand patients' recovery experiences and raise awareness of self, others, and relationships with the world. These healing experiences are physical, emotional, and connective experiences, as well as changes in the perception and understanding of relationships and self-improvement. In these themes, clinicians are considered to learn about the essence of psychological distress and the effect of the family system on the individual.

**Iceberg metaphor.** The iceberg metaphor, an important concept of Satir's model, is a technique often used in therapy. In this technique, the advisor's own iceberg metaphors are examined, descriptions made, and imbalances that prevent adaptation detected and eliminated. The iceberg metaphor consists of three dimensions: interpersonal, intrapsychic, and universal-spiritual. The layers in the metaphor, which make up the layers of a person, interact. If a disturbance occurs in a person's universal-spiritual dimension in relation to God/life force, it manifests itself negatively in the other layers. Finally, the visible communication attitudes on the iceberg are also affected by this disturbance and turn into blame, placation, super-reasonability, or irrelevance. This is an individual's self-defense against their own incongruence (Satir et al., 1991).

When therapists have strong spiritual beliefs, they really understand the iceberg metaphor, which facilitates their spiritual moments with patients. In this situation, spiritual beliefs do not need to change; one's spiritual nature can support the healing process (Lum, 2008). Many applications and studies show examples of the iceberg metaphor providing healing.



**Bentheim (2005)** investigated the effect of spiritual pairing on adaptation to distinguish the therapeutic value of pairing in a number of religious contexts within the framework of Satir's model. This study examined the relationships of 14 adult participants (seven couples) who identified themselves with Catholicism, Judaism, the United Church of Christ, the Christian Science Church, and North American Tibetan Buddhism. The couples participated in unstructured interviews, which were then analyzed in terms of each couple's common narrative. At the end of analysis, interpretations were made contextually using Satir's Model, in particular the iceberg metaphor. These interpretations include: a) for each couple, the "I" and "the other" experienced great contextual difficulties in terms of being; b) this distinguished couples' common universal aspirations, and c) contextual differences for the self, other, and we. Feedback from the study showed that six couples underwent transformations and significant changes in their lives as a couple, and three pairs made significant changes in terms of religion. Satir's model was expanded to distinguish the universal aspirations in the study from the effect of being a couple in various contexts, in particular the double-mandala diagram.

**Breen's (1996)** study attempted to understand the mourning process in the family system using Satir's model. According to the study in terms of the iceberg metaphor, when a family member dies, the family system enters into chaos; during the chaos the family may resort to incongruent communication styles to cope with the loss. The distance of this chaotic period from the harmony the families had experienced is part of the mourning process. As a result, family therapists were observed to be able to work in ways that are appropriate for families experiencing chaos; they can advise families on how to integrate into a new adjustment process.

**Carlock (2008)** investigated heterosexuality and homophobia, the effects of being gay/lesbian on the development of subjectivity, and how to treat internalized homophobia, showing how the concepts and processes of Satir's model can be used to transform self-perception. Carlock presented a three-way treatment process that uses the iceberg metaphor:

1. Raise awareness of individuals' positive and negative core beliefs and values on gays and lesbians. Raise awareness about how gays and lesbians have personally dealt with this situation.
2. Process the positive and negative experiences about being gay or lesbian. Provide support for both internal and interpersonal resources.
3. Examine negative experiences about being gay or lesbian. Transform improper outcomes from these experiences.

**Carlock's (2008)** study has numerous short descriptions showing treatment concepts, as well as texts discussing how certain tools in Satir's model (iceberg,





family map, life chronology, sculpture, etc.) come together. Satir's model presents processes that can help homosexuals undertake an important role in building a healthy homosexual identity. Satir therapists provide homosexuals with the ability to look at themselves and ease their burden from cultural prejudices by alleviating their pain from internalized homophobia.

Daum and Wiebe (2003) examined the change and self-dimensions of university freshman students' control beliefs. Daum and Wiebe presented Satir's counseling theory on the iceberg metaphor as a comprehensive model for students' research and practices. Daum and Wiebe applied the Personal Meaning Profile, Academic Locus of Control, and Self-Description Questionnaire (SDQ) to 116 participants. According to the results, students' definition of self can be influenced over time by religious and academic aspects because students' sense of religion and love is greater than the academic aspect of their lives.

Li and Vivian's (2013) study analyzed the possible negative effects in Chinese culture of being self-defeating, having high self-esteem, and mismatches when expressing feelings. Satir's model was then shown to help counselors be rid of their injured self by means of using the iceberg metaphor throughout the consultation process. This study contains an analysis of 20 consultation-session experiences in Beijing. With its therapeutic approach to power regulation and change, Satir's model has made Chinese consultants gain self-respect, take greater personal responsibility, make better choices, and enhance personal adaptability.

Lum, Smith, and Ferris (2002) conducted a study on the use of Satir's model to prevent youth suicide. Youth suicide is a very important social issue for families, therapists, and aid professionals. Their study effectively used the iceberg metaphor and presented a genuine story of the genetic component, discussing Satir's theoretical therapeutic model applied to the surviving members. Satir's model has innumerable uses for interventions such as encouraging the desire to live, ensuring that youths who try to commit suicide are dealt with humanely and hopefully and include more positivity in their lives. According to Satir, while having concentrated on communication attitudes in the past, the model now provides in-depth understanding of one's inner world using successful attitudes.

Srikosai (2008) addressed the concern about the desire and accompanying despair and depression that were affecting a patient's alcohol re-use in a study on an alcohol-dependent and depressed patient's treatment using Satir's model. Although the patient was a very productive writer, the patient felt alone coping with problems related to low self-esteem and alcohol consumption. Using the iceberg metaphor technique from Satir's model, the study aimed to identify the patient's internal experiences, understand coping attitudes, and adapt them to survival. It also aimed to develop a

family map and development graph, as well as increase life energy, positive thinking, and positive outcomes. As a result, the patient's inner world transformed. The patient became more capable of self-acceptance and felt more peace and tranquility, eventually becoming alcohol-free.

Sinkosai, Thapinta, Kittilattanapaiboon, and Piyavhatkul (2014) measured the drinking behaviors, habits, and self-esteem of 39 alcoholic women in Thanyarak Chiangmai Hospital in Thailand using the Alcohol Self Efficacy Measure of alcohol consumption, intensive alcohol consumption, and no alcohol consumption. The study had 18 participants in the experimental group and 21 in the control group. According to the results, the program for preventing alcohol addiction increased participants' self-esteem, self-sufficiency, and life satisfaction; they passed more days alcohol free, and the days spent drinking decreased compared to the control group. Statistically significant lower alcohol levels were found in the experimental group compared to the control group. The alcohol prevention program based on Satir's model improved the psychological health and prevented the recurrence of alcoholic episodes among these women.

**Self-mandala.** Another important concept in Satir's model is the self mandala and has also been frequently used in therapies. In this technique, the client's own self-mandala is created. This can be a verbal activity or a role play. The aim is to have the client become aware of the parts that make up the self and see what they can do to improve these dimensions. The self-mandala consists of eight dimensions that are thought to represent self. These dimensions are spiritual, physical, intellectual, emotional, sensual, interactional, nutritional, and contextual. Any imbalance seen in these dimensions impairs the self. For example, when there is conflict, a gap or impairment in the individual's spiritual dimension negatively affects self-perception, resulting in problems (Satir, 1988, 2008).

Satir says the therapist has certain specific responsibilities in therapy. One of these involves the therapist's belief system. Satir observed therapists' beliefs to be of interest to the spiritual dimension of treatment (Nestlerode, 1989). A therapist who allows clients to reflect their belief systems in a therapeutic setting can also use the spiritual dimension of self-censorship effectively. Therapists have been shown to use the self-mandala to accelerate the therapeutic treatment. Examples of practices and research exist that show healing can be achieved through self-engagement.

Caston's (2009) study on family caregivers investigated the self-supervisory skills of caregivers trained under Satir's model using the self-latch with 30 people in the experimental group and 30 in the control group. According to the study's first hypothesis, the experimental group will have higher self-esteem than the control group. According to the second hypothesis, the experimental group will have lower



burnout levels than the control group. As a result, the experimental group's family-career burnout levels were observed to decrease significantly after the training.

Yang's (2000) study on Chinese women looked at how 24 Taiwanese women experienced the educational program based on Satir's model and what they learned about themselves and the group process. The study was designed as an action research with participants presenting their diaries and providing verbal feedback in each session of the group process to adjust the program's development. Several key themes were identified by analyzing the diaries of the participants and researchers, the audio tapes of group activities, and the transcripts of the post-group interviews. The first theme comes from the reasons for self-growth being group interactions and personal commitment levels. The second key theme is that how one accepts being vulnerable in their original family can provide a turning point to create an impulse towards self-growth. In the third theme of the self-growth process, awareness and thinking were found to be critical factors. As a result, this internal transformation has changed participants' ways of thinking.

### Conclusion

After the 1980s, Satir's family therapy, which had begun integrating spirituality into family therapy with interest in humanistic and cosmic spirituality, used spirituality as a tool to enhance its aim of congruence. This context described the spiritual direction of self, especially through the iceberg metaphor and self-mandala. Psychological problems arise when a person lacks balance in their spiritual orientation. Satir's family therapy tackles these problems with a number of basic techniques: the techniques of spiritual content used in therapy, imagination, awareness studies consisting of breathing exercises and relaxation techniques, meditation, the iceberg metaphor, and the self-mandala. The goal of therapy is to provide harmony among the parts that form the self (Satir, 1988; 2001; 2008; Satir, et al., 1991).

Satir's family therapy has been applied to couples and families in addition to individuals, and has succeeded on many specific issues. While no studies are found in Turkey on the spiritual orientation of Satir's family therapy, numerous studies are found in the literature outside of Turkey. These studies contain the subjects of therapy sessions using spiritual-content therapeutic techniques on spiritual perceptions, homophobia, addictions, depression, suicide, mourning, and self-esteem in couples, family, and individual therapies (Bentheim, 2005; Breen, 1996; Carlock, 2008; Caston, 2009; Daum & Wiebe, 2003; Dawson, 2008; Li & Vivian, 2013; Lum et al., 2002; Ruhl, 2013; Srikosai, 2008; Srikosai, et al., 2014; Yang, 2000).

Spiritual beliefs are well-known to be related to mental and psychological health and play an important role in diagnosis, treatment, and general clinical efficacy.

Accordingly, spiritual diversity in couple and family therapies can accelerate the process of healing. Thickens (2012) investigated practices involving spiritual diversity in couples and family therapy training and found it to be ethically necessary to integrate a spiritually diverse curriculum into all couples and family therapy training programs.

Satir's family therapy can be examined in terms of its spiritual diversity. Experimentally, Satir's methods can be tested using larger and more varied samples using stronger methodology. To investigate all aspects of Satir's family therapy requires deeper examination. For example, according to the results from Wretman's (2016) study, which was based on Satir's basic therapeutic methods for working with families and used empirical evidence to support the use of these methods, Satir's model needs to be further improved and systematized for clinicians. Thus, Satir's family therapy can be more recognized in all aspects, and spiritually oriented therapy can be used more effectively.

When family therapy methods successfully make it easier for couples to reflect their belief systems, the therapy environment becomes more sincere and acceptable for couples, and thus more successful outcomes occur (Duba & Watts, 2009). With this thought in mind, the spiritual orientation of Satir's family therapy can be effectively used as a therapy in Turkey by practitioners in consideration of clients' different needs; the effectiveness of spiritually-oriented therapy can be examined by researchers in different ways. This study is estimated to be a first for practitioners and researchers in Turkey to explore the spiritual aspect of Satir's family therapy, which uses spirituality to enhance congruence and displays interest in humanistic and cosmic spirituality.

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Original Article

## Spirituality in Logotherapy

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### Abstract

Frankl wrote that he needed to find meaning in his life so that he could sustain his life physically, psychologically, and spiritually. In other words, when an individual understands meaning in life, these three dimensions will be in a healthy interaction. The spiritual dimension and the other two dimensions have healing power. Therefore, it will become even easier for a person who is aware of the spiritual side and acts with this consciousness to find meaning. One of the most effective elements in finding meaning is spirituality. Studies have shown that spirituality helps people find meaning in their lives and even has an important effect in defeating the fear of death. In this respect, logotherapy does not reject spirituality and religion but rather encourages their use. This study examines the perspective of religion and spirituality in logotherapy and touches on the work done in this area. The spiritual point of view and applications of logotherapy, which center on finding meaning in the final analysis, are included in this study.

### Keywords

Spirituality • Logotherapy • Meaning • Spiritual orientation therapy

## Logoterapi’de Maneviyat

### Öz

Frankl insanın yaşamını fiziksel, psikolojik ve ruhsal olarak sağlıklı bir şekilde sürdürebilmesi için hayatında bir anlam bulması gerektiğini söylemektedir. Yani birey ancak anlama ulaştığında bu üç boyutun sağlıklı bir etkileşim içinde olması beklenir. Ruhsal boyut, diğer iki boyutu da iyileştirme gücüne sahiptir. Dolayısıyla ruhsal yönünden haberdar olan ve bunun bilinciyle hareket eden kişinin anlam bulması daha da kolaylaşacaktır. Anlam bulma noktasında en etkili yönlerden birisi maneviyyattır. Maneviyyatın insanın hayatında anlam bulmasına yardımcı olduğu ve hatta ölüm korkusunu yenmede önemli bir etkiye sahip olduğu yapılan çalışmalarla gösterilmiştir. Bu yönüyle Logoterapi maneviyyat ve dini reddetmemekte aksine bunlardan yararlanmayı desteklemektedir. Bu çalışma ile Logoterapi’nin din ve maneviyyata olan bakış açısı incelenmekte ve bu alanda yapılmış olan çalışmalara temas edilmektedir. Son tahlilde anlam bulmayı merkeze alan Logoterapi’nin manevi bakış açısı ve uygulamaları bu çalışma içinde yer almaktadır.

### Anahtar Kelimeler

Maneviyyat • Logoterapi • Anlam • Manevi yönelimli terapi

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Throughout history, humanity has engaged with existential questions: Why are we here? For what purposes do we live in the world? Why are we standing here? What does life mean? (Batthyany & Russo-Netzer, 2014). Such questions have emerged as a reflection of universal loss, and people have been searching for answers in more or less all cultures throughout time. This attitude toward human life emphasizes the spiritual or spiritual dimension of man, which centers on the idea that a person is carrying out a quest for freedom and making choices (Guttmann, 2008). Human life was greatly affected by rapid and dizzying changes that took place as a result of scientific advances in the 20th century; namely, life complexities and uncertainties increased with the social and cultural changes taking place. As a result, people faced the greatest problem of the time, “existential barriers,” and began to “search for meaning” for “existential vacancy,” which came to fruition (Bahadır, 2011).

Priorities are the phenomena that must be avoided for Psychology; Religion and spirituality became important again. Once avoided in the field of psychology, religion and spirituality became important again and started to be questioned. Religious belief is a multi-faceted structure that helps answer questions about the meaning and purpose of life (Calhoun & Tedeschi, 1999). Religious beliefs and practices can help a person to recognize himself, to have self-regulation, and to find meaning (Powell, Shahabi, & Thoresen, 2000). Religion and spirituality, which are multi-dimensional concepts, have positive effects on psychological and physiological health (Chen & Koenig, 2006).

Early psychological associations sought scientific explanations for human behaviors and problems and have adopted a more positivist approach. However, contemporary psychology trends have focused on existential problems and on solving psychological problems by protecting the individual’s mental health (Bahadır, 2011). Morgan (2013) and Frankl tried to answer the question “What do we do when there is nothing to do?” According to Morgan, logotherapy helps one make sense of life and offers meaning to those who have no idea what to do. He says that the most important problem of man is focusing on finding meaning as the most fundamental and powerful motivating force.

Logotherapy, called the Third Viennese School and founded by Viktor Emil Frankl, intends to save people from a sense of meaninglessness, to help them find meaning, and to save from them the “existential void.” Costello (2016) argued that while Frankl created logotherapy, he categorized religion separately and therefore failed to blend the concepts of religion and psychology. Moreover, Frankl did not specifically describe Christian, Muslim, or Jewish logotherapy, and he emphasized that he could work with atheists as well. Costello also noted that Frankl treated logotherapy and religion in separate contexts and that logotherapy tries to treat psychological problems but includes religion and spirituality in the treatment process. Thus, logotherapy is a

psychotherapy current and far from a religious current. However, it does not ignore the religious or spiritual dimensions that can help an individual at the point of finding meaning. On the matter of psychotherapy and religion, Frankl wrote,

Although the purpose of psychotherapy is spiritual healing, religion is the salvation of the soul... Although religion does not show the spiritual healing and protection as the main purpose, it can create a psycho-hygienic and almost psychotherapeutic effect in terms of its results, giving people the confidence (Frankl, 2014). Although Frankl's logotherapy tries to separate religion and spirituality from each other or to position them differently, religion and spirituality are not necessarily separated within logotherapy. If there are religious beliefs and values in the interest of the person, religion and spirituality will undoubtedly contribute to solving one's problems (Aydin, 2004). All these explanations show that religion and spirituality function very importantly to enable a person who is searching for meaning to find it and to get rid of existential vacancy. From this point of view, inquiring into the relation of logotherapy with religion and spirituality will help us to understand in more detail how to explore the applications of religion and spirituality with a wide perspective and what forms are effective. It is appropriate to conduct such a study to clarify and examine these points in detail. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to identify what religious or spiritual activities individuals perform when they seek "meaning" in "existential space" and to objectively present the effectiveness of these activities.

### **Logotherapy Philosophy and Relationship**

The basic philosophy of logotherapy is to help the individual find meaning in his life. How does Logan look at religion in the process of finding meaning, where is it located, and how does one use it? It would be correct to explain the answers to these basic questions either from Frankl's own views or from those of theologian logotherapists. Bahadır (2011) stated that although Frankl was a religious person and the theoretical part of logotherapy emphasizes religiosity, this is not seen in practice. According to Frankl and Kreuzer (1994), religion is a deep part of human beings and is not fully reflected on the outside. However, it is very important for Frankl that religion and psychology or therapy should be close to each other. Frankl (2014) wrote, "Religion gives more than psychotherapy to man and demands more than that. The pollution of these areas, which complement each other and which are foreign to each other in terms of their aims, should be rejected in principle." As can be seen from these sentences, religion and psychotherapy are two phenomena complementing each other according to logotherapy but moving in different directions. If they are intermixed with each other or used to keep each other in place, according to Frankl, this will harm both of them. Morgan (2013) expressed Frankl's point of view on religion and spirituality as follows:



Frankl is neither against believers nor on belief-based worldviews. It is only against the fact that a certain group of spirituality belongs. Or according to Frankl, it is not right to oppose religion and spirituality that help people throughout the day. Religion is corrupted, or where people are deceived. Because “spirituality” is a fundamental component of human nature and man cannot be considered apart from him.

Frankl saw the relationship between man and spirituality as being built on two important concepts: “unconscious God” and “unconscious religion.” The intention is to express that a person is always conscious of a religious or spiritual belief in the same way that there is a God who is associated with man though man is unconscious of it. Here, we must note two points: First, Frankl was not talking about an unconscious God. On the contrary, he spoke of a God who is in intimate relationship with man though man is not conscious of it. In contrast, God has not acquired human space. God is only human by influence. Anyone who believes in a religion has internalized God in the depths of the soul (Frankl, 2014). With Frankl or logotherapy philosophy, it is not possible to mention finding meaning without discussing religion or spirituality at some point. Religion and spirituality exist within the therapy process even if they are not practiced therapeutically, as it is with them that the client can reach a higher understanding.

In all cases, logotherapy, which is considered to be psychotherapy, is not only meaningless, but it is my belief that the ultimate meaning, the dealing with the superficial meaning, and the religious belief in the end are my beliefs in the ultimate understanding (Frankl 2014).

According to Frankl, spiritual beliefs makes it easier for people to find meaning. However, he does not claim that one cannot find meaning without faith. There is a separation between belief and non-belief, and it is said that belief can be found with conscience, and belief is with God (Hahn, 1994). Frankl’s mountain metaphor is helpful in understanding the point: A faithful individual and an unbeliever climb a mountain together. The unbeliever stops there because of the layer of fog that arrives before the summit. This is because uncertainty scares him. The faithful climber, on the other hand, continues his way to the top because of his faith in God. Therefore, a devout person has a deeper sense of responsibility and consciousness (Kolbe, 1986). Bahadır (2000) wrote that the conscience is the last point reached by unbelievers. As Pargament (2007) stated, spirituality is an ordinary part of human life. Spirituality is influential in the vital points of human life from birth to death, and sometimes it can emerge much more clearly. Spirituality in times of crisis and disaster, and points we cannot understand help us to navigate situations that we cannot control. In addition, spirituality is beneficial not only in times of crisis, but in every stage of life.

In this context, the relation of logotherapy with religion and spirituality is very deep and tight, as understood from Frankl's descriptions. It is therefore emphasized that there is no inconvenience in using spirituality in logotherapy, as long as religion or spirituality is not used as a means of oppression or as a doorway to charlatanism. Therefore, spiritually oriented logotherapeutic studies will provide explanatory results at the point of testing the effectiveness and philosophy of logotherapy.

## Logotherapy Concepts and Techniques

### Concepts

Frankl's logotherapy, based on "finding meaning," assumes an individual's main goal is to find meaning. Life, according to Frankl, is meaningful in all circumstances, even the most difficult and unbearable situations. Frankl believed it is important not to understand the meaning of life in general, but to discover the special meaning of the individual (Morgan, 2005). For this reason, the priority of logotherapy is a psychotherapy school that helps one to find a vital sense of meaning. Frankl emphasized that other schools treat human beings physically and psychologically/mentally, neglecting the spiritual dimension, which is the most important one (Patterson & Watkins, 1996). Therefore, logotherapy deals with the psychological dimension and tries to bring solutions through the situations that take place there. Therapy in logotherapy is based on the treatment slogan "through meaning" (Bahadır, 2011).

To understand logotherapy correctly, it is important to have knowledge about the following concepts (see Figure 1)

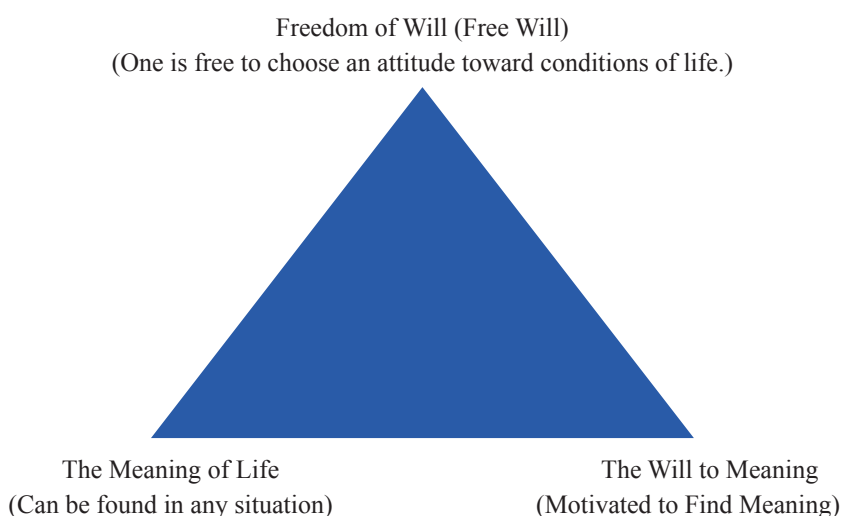


Figure 1. Basic assumptions of logotherapy (Wong, 1997).



**Freedom of will.** Frankl stated that people have the freedom of will and that they are obliged to carry their responsibilities as their decisions are the power and capacity they give (Frankl, 1988). In this context, it is of great importance that people are aware of the will of the person and act accordingly.

**The will to meaning.** One of the premises and basic concepts of logotherapy is “meaninglessness.” For the individual who has freedom of will, meaninglessness or willingness may emerge. Baumeister (1991) did his first empirical work on this subject to understand what the significance of meaning is in reality. For people to live, they need to have certain physical needs met, such as eating and drinking. Yet people also seek answers to questions about the meaning of life from psychologically and spiritually viewpoints. According to Heisel and Flet (2004), if one is constantly struggling to find meaning, this of course does not physically finish his life but pushes him toward suicide. Harlow, Newcomb, and Bentler (1986) reported that such struggle increased the possibility of suicide, loneliness, and many other disturbing problems. It is crucial to have a sense of meaning for one to perform healthier functions in life. Moreover, for one to have a sense of meaning, the individual must be free and bear responsibility. Karahan and Sardoğan (2004) stated that people can accept or reject what is free, using their capacity of choice. They also stated that being human beings in the same way is possible with responsibility.

**The meaning of life.** One of Frankl’s basic assumptions or concepts is the meaning of life. According to Wong (2014), the person who has the will to create is trying to find meaning, even in places such as Nazi camps or ruthless battlefields. People living in ruined countries seem to have a unique meaning for coping with trauma. Continuing, Wong (2014) explained that Frankl considered two points in regard to the meaning of life: the ultimate meaning and the situational meaning. The ultimate meaning is beyond understanding, but in this ultimate sense there is situational meaning, and in every chaos and destructive environment, a meaning is discovered with this potential. Frankl (2013) wrote that meaning must be discovered in the world. If a sense of our own or our soul is reflected in our world, then this is not a real meaning. The intent here is to provide physical and mental health together and reflect the whole human being.

**Existential barriers.** Frankl (2013) said that people will have existential obstacles in their lives as a result of the need to understand, to avoid, or to suffer. That is, when the relationship between the individual and the search for meaning is cut off, it is faced with existential obstruction.

**Noogenic neuroses.** Frankl (2013) described that in the wake of existential obstacles, neurogenic neuroses arise and this leads to an internal conflict. However, each conflict is not a neurogenic neurosis. On the contrary, it is an effort to find meaning.

**Common neuroses.** Individuals who escape from responsibility and freedom produce common neuroses for a variety of reasons. Especially in desperate situations, individuals may be fascinated by the belief that they cannot change things. Such attitudes lead people to think that they cannot plan and organize their own lives (Patterson & Watkins, 1996). Therefore, if they show common behavior together with those like themselves, they will not feel the sense of responsibility when they fall into it.

**Existential space.** Existential space can be interpreted as meaninglessly falling into meaninglessness. Gündoğan (1997) described that there is an existential gap in the sense that one is not in search of meaning, is writhing in helplessness, and has lost beliefs for the future. Frankl (2006) emphasized that the existential gap, which is synonymous with meaninglessness, is one of the most important problems of the individual. Öcal (2010) stated that meaning is equivalent to freedom, so it would be easier for individuals who have lost freedom and responsibility to become meaningless. Altıntaş and Gültekin (2004) found the existential gap: sadness, stagnation, and insensitivity to others.

## Techniques

Logotherapy uses many techniques in general. However, basically four techniques are used: paradoxical intentions, changing the mindset, shaping attitudes, and dialogic dialog (Barnes, 2005; Welter, 2005).

**Paradoxical intent.** Frankl (1988) described his paradoxical intention as encouraging and challenging the individual to face the fear of confrontation. This technique may be used to counter phobia, obsessiveness, and anxiety (Rice, 2005; Lukas, 1986). Paradoxically, the aim is that, instead of dealing with one's own symptoms, the person treats them with mockery and breaks the vicious circle that he has fallen into. The individual will learn not to ignore these problems over time, just as he will not ridicule them (Karahan & Sardoğan, 2004). Over time, as the individual begins to make them consciously, he is no longer afraid of the old (Marshall, 2011). This technique is used in family therapies, behavioral approaches, and gestalt approaches as well as in logotherapy (Ascher, 2002). The paradoxical intention technique, which is quite effective in a short period of time, is used successfully to treat sleep problems, agoraphobia, and anxiety (Schulenberg, 2003).

**Changing the thought focus.** Diving into an individual's thoughts can create problems for the person. With this technique, it is possible to change the direction of the thought that pushes the person to the problems and instead to get away from the problems (Lukas, 1986). The technique was developed by Frankl in the wake of World War II (Ameli & Dattilio, 2013). It is useful for a person who has a certain



position of worry. However, if people become obsessed with their worries, they may become victims of problems (Graber, 2004). This technique is fully engaged at this point. Attempts are made to ensure that clients have a healthy mindset by changing the mindset of those who spend excessive time worrying (Welter, 2005). This technique is used in many cases.

**Formation of attitudes.** This technique was developed by Lukas for mentally challenged clients (Marshall, 2011). A client who faces a problem but so far cannot solve it looks for a clue to make changes in a desperate situation (Schulenberg, Hutzell, Nassif, & Rogina, 2008). The changes that take place in the client's attitudes will help at least to bear the problems of the person (Rice, 2005). The changes that will be brought about in the attitudes of the individuals toward their unbearable problems are then brought to a state of being based on the technique of shaping their attitudes.

**Socratic dialog.** This is a technique that helps the individual to make explorations within himself/herself to facilitate meaning in the life of the individual and to help make sense in the same way (Schullenberg et al., 2008). The counselor in the dialog asks several questions according to the situation of the client to be aware of the client (Scraper, 2000). Of course, the style and quality of the questions asked in such cases is very important. Graber (2004) explained why evil-good questions should be avoided in favor of questions about what, when, where, who, how, and if.

The following supplementary techniques are also available in the logotherapy process (Düşünceli, 2015; Graber, 2004; Marshall, 2011; Schulenberg et al., 2008; Welter, 2005).

- i. Mountain range exercise
- ii. The movie of your life
- iii. Alternative list
- iv. Symbols and metaphors
- v. Logoanalysis
- vi. Logodr Game
- vii. Basic list
- viii. Guided autobiography
- ix. Logoanchor technique (Meaning refuge)



## Religion, Ministry, and Logotherapy

When the concept of meaning is considered, situations related to spirituality likely come to mind, because man can find meaning only through internal direction. This means that life is in a person who seeks life. Bucher (2007) stated that the concepts of spirituality and piety were discussed in research carried out toward the end of the last century, and that they were not exactly separated from one another. However, the two are mentioned as concepts that help to find meaning in the life of the individual. Meditative movements and esoteric occasions became popular due to people's spiritual needs (Grom, 2009). Such situations should be seen as efforts to make sense of the individual's life. However, religion and spirituality have been perceived as medieval dogmas, and consequently they were ignored despite being important in making people's lives meaningful (Utsch, Bonelli, & Pfeifer, 2014). In this section, various topics such as the relationship between logotherapy and spirituality will be examined and various perspectives will be explored.

### Meaning in Religious Literature

Questions about the meaning of life have always been difficult. Scientists, philosophers, and religious leaders have made numerous provocative arguments. The very essence of our existence in the world is, as always, of utmost importance. The essence of our being is that we have difficulty understanding that we are not enough to see life as a single link on a chain. It should be compared to other links. For this reason, it is not surprising that many people turn to religion as a source of meaning because of the doubts they have experienced about life and the general values of life (Guttman, 2008). Therefore, we will analyze ideas about the meaning of life in religious literature.

**Meaning of life according to Judaism.** To describe the relationship between meaning and religion in life, Jacobson (1995) offered a story: In a difficult winter season, two Jewish religious researchers came to a small town in Russia. They told me they had a religious bath there. The townspeople had a bath there, but it was very dangerous to go to the *hamam* on the mountain slope in the freezing weather. Although the two students did not believe the story, they set out the next day to test the truth of it. They saw an old man walking down the mountain slope with sure steps. They often got lost in the ice trying to follow him. Finally, when they came to the bath, they asked the old man, "How could you walk safely on this path?" The old man responded, "The more closely a person is tied up to Allah, the less rare he is." Jacobson linked this story to the words of Rabbi Schneerson. According to him, there are two approaches to investigating the truth: the first is the search for meaning by science, and the second is searching for meaning through God or religion. There is no question that the universe is guided by reason. At first, one starts to look for the





truth by trying to understand various events and then combining the pieces together like a jigsaw to make a painting. Scientists and philosophers look at the outer layers of the universe to discover the forces that lie within them. We all should know that whether we admit it or not, the hand in the glove is God. If we try to look for truth and meaning by observing the truth and experiencing the laws taught to us by looking at what the Creator has told us, we become more fully aware of how the Earth works and why it is created. In fact, true religion and true science are two different faces of the same medallion (Guttman, 2008; Jacobson, 1995).

The various Jewish rabbis in the study of meaning stress a strong link between science and God. They do not deny that science is technologically the cause of a dramatic change in living conditions (Guttman, 2008). The meaning of life in the Jewish religious perspective refers to the person's standing before God and his consciousness about this stance. This consciousness is the content and essence of religious belief. Professor Leibovits (1999) considered the question "What is the meaning of life?" He answered as follows: If one tries to find the meaning of life without regard to how long one lives, one can catch the ultimate meaning in life. This purpose or essence serves God. Raz (1986) noted that a Jewish rabbi likened Earth to a narrow bridge with cliffs on both sides. A strong faith and a bold spirit are required to provide safe passage from this bridge. Stress, depression, and sadness are common situations in human life. Faithful people can achieve happiness if things go well. A person can be happy even if his work goes bad. For though he is weak, he wants his face to connect with the mercy of God and for God to give him happy days.

When we look at Judaism and meaning in general, it seems that finding meaning in Judaism is possible only by being connected with God. In the same way, it is also seen that the Jews possessed much of logotherapy. Various criticisms have also been made. Bulka (1972) stated that logotherapy tries to show that philosophical foundations are related to Judaism: "I cannot say that logotherapy takes every aspect of Judaism, but there is also sufficient evidence that there is a philosophically sound link between logotherapy and Judaism." Jewish-oriented logotherapy applications will be given at the end of the chapter.

**Meaning of life according to Christianity.** It is necessary to talk about the interaction between Christianity and logotherapy, since Christians do not necessarily find meaning. Since the first years of logotherapy, studies on logotherapy and Christianity have been done and books have been written. Tweedie and Donald (1963) wrote a large book on this subject, in which they stated that logotherapy was compatible with Christianity but that it separated from the Bible in some basic beliefs. According to Wong (1997), for Christians, one's profession is very important in finding meaning as fulfilling a profession is seen as a responsibility to God.

This leads to positive thinking and a purposeful life. It affects both one's emotions and one's life. In this context, examples will be presented of Christian-supported logotherapy applications. Figure 2 shows the steps of spiritual orientation of the problems encountered by workers engaged in Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy.

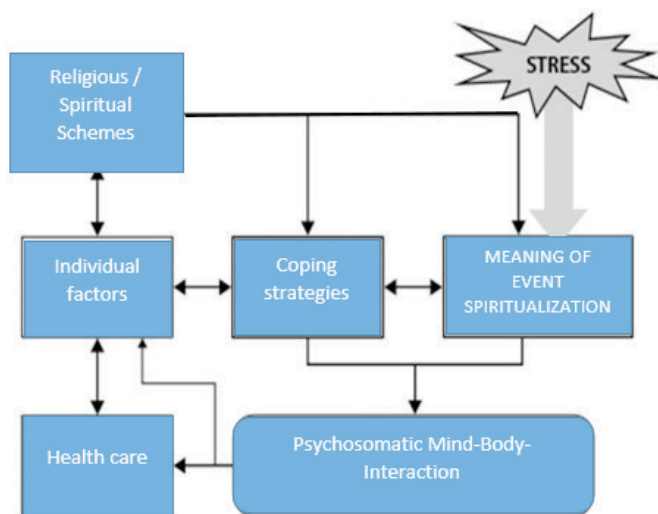


Figure 2. Strategies for spiritual orientation toward stress determined by Utsch et al. (2014).

**Meaning of life according to Islam.** The basic philosophy of logotherapy is not far from Islam. However, Muslim psychotherapists have not addressed this issue in depth. Some religious and spiritual arguments have been placed among the logotherapeutic interventions in Iran, Pakistan, and several other Islamic countries.

### Spiritually Oriented Logotherapy Principles and Steps

Researchers suggested that various principles and steps must be known to begin Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy. Guttmann (2008) suggested that Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy works within the framework of the principles shown in Table 1.



Table 1  
*Principles*

1. THE FIRST PRINCIPLE: FREEDOM OF WILL	2. THE SECOND PRINCIPLE: THE DEFIANT POWER OF THE HUMAN SPIRIT
3. THE THIRD PRINCIPLE: THE THREE HUMAN DIMENSIONS	4. THE FOURTH PRINCIPLE: THE HUMAN SPIRIT IS THE HEALTHY NUCLEUS IN EACH HUMAN BEING
5. THE FIFTH PRINCIPLE: MAN CAN RISE ABOVE AND BEYOND HIMSELF	6. THE SIXTH PRINCIPLE: WE HAVE THE CAPACITY FOR SELF-DETACHMENT
7. THE SEVENTH PRINCIPLE: WE LIVE IN THE PRESENT AND SHOULD LOOK FORWARD TO THE FUTURE	8. THE EIGHTH PRINCIPLE: EACH MAN IS UNIQUE AND IRREPLACEABLE
9. THE NINTH PRINCIPLE: MEANING IS SUBJECTIVE AND CHANGING	10. THE TENTH PRINCIPLE: THE MEANING OF THE MOMENT
11. THE ELEVENTH PRINCIPLE: WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CHOICES	12. THE TWELFTH PRINCIPLE: SPIRITUAL TENSION
13. THE THIRTEENTH PRINCIPLE: DISCOVERING MEANING IN LIFE IS NOT A GIFT BUT AN ACHIEVEMENT	14. THE FOURTEENTH PRINCIPLE: A POSITIVE ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE
15. THE FIFTEENTH PRINCIPLE: HAPPINESS IS A BY-PRODUCT OF MEANING IN LIFE	

Southwick, Lowthert, and Graber (2016) summarized the following steps for Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy against stress and trauma.

**Definition.** Logotherapy is a healthy way of reaching understanding. It considers concepts such as healthy thinking, creativity, imagination, belief, love, conscience, and self-transcendence. Fabry (1975) emphasized that there are three dimensions to each person, and a person is only “real” if these dimensions are together. The three dimensions are the body, mind, and spirit. Logotherapy starts the therapy process with the definition of human. When people are defined correctly, real results can be obtained.

**Optimism.** An important point in logotherapy is optimism. Frankl (1988) argues that logotherapy is an optimistic approach and that successes may be possible with optimism. Graber (2004) noted that there is realistic optimism in logotherapy, which is very useful in the therapeutic process.

**Facing fear.** It is important to confront fear in Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy. Especially with the “paradoxical intent” technique, one looks at one’s own humorous feelings and understands that he is something to be afraid of instead of being afraid his symptoms. The example therapy at the end of the chapter will be examined in more detail in practice.

**Values.** Frankl (1986) believed that universal values exist. Fabry (1975) explained that these are time tested values. These values touch the spiritual direction of a person and prevent the individual from easily experiencing trauma. Frankl (1986) described values within the meaning of a triangle. The first of these values is that each individual has a distinctive creativity and unique aspects. If contact is made, the person will be

returned from where he or she fell. The second value consists of the experiences of one's life. These experiences have a very important place in finding meaning. The third value comprises attitude values. The most important point here is "religion." Our experience can only gain meaning with religion, love, and reality (Graber, 2004).

**Altruism.** Identity is called the heart of logotherapy. Frankl (1986) believed that one can always find true meaning through love and compassion and that one's self is related to love's values and only to others. Graber (2004) noted that in logotherapy, this means reaching the appropriate targets and responsibilities toward other people.

**Religiousness/spirituality.** Although Frankl saw logotherapy as a philosophy of life, not as a religion, he gave a special importance to it. Nevertheless, psychotherapy and religion were never placed by each other (Graber, 2004). In logotherapy, spirituality and religion do not mean the same thing and are different as from each other. Frankl (1988) emphasized that it is important to take advantage of religious beliefs and to take advantage of this flexibility. According to Frankl, religion gives spiritual power that a person cannot find anywhere else and makes it easy to reach the final meaning. Logotherapy can work with any kind of religion. The aim is to make it easier for someone to find meaning by receiving support from their spiritual values. Logotherapy, which improves the integrity of the mind, body, and soul, sees religious values as an important point of self-sufficiency. As Fabry (1975) wrote, in logotherapy, belief is the power of the individual to find meaning, and this state of affairs has made man more than love.

**Flexibility: Acceptance and cognitive reassessment.** Flexibility in how the individual thinks and behaves in stressful and difficult times is very important. Individuals with strong coping mechanisms are more resistant to difficult circumstances. Survey respondents indicated they used different cognitive and emotional strategies in the struggle against stress. They removed negativities through humor and changed negative beliefs by reasserting their own beliefs (Southwick & Charney, 2012b).

Graber (2009) emphasized that being aware of the facts actually hides the seed of meaning. He demonstrated that those who face sorrows and accept them become more compassionate people. The most important point here is not a strict position but a flexible position.

**Humor.** Frankl (2006) believed that people are freed from humiliating situations through humor. Humor indicates that one can defeat one's destiny. According to Frankl, the soul uses humor as a weapon to protect itself. Graber (2004) wrote that from now on we are able to fall in love. Humor in this direction is an effective method applied in logotherapy.



**Active head.** Frankl (1986) noted that it is important to deal actively with things in life. For this, the individual has to describe his tasks well and encode them well because no one can bring a healthy solution as much as a solution that will bring the individual to a state that he or she has correctly coded. Therefore, it is very important for the individual to be aware of his/her duties and responsibilities and actively deal with the problem.

**Stress training.** Frankl (1988) said that some stress and tension is beneficial to the human psyche, but excessive stress and tension can destroy the internal balance and therefore must be reduced. In this respect, stress education and stress coping strategies are important points for logotherapy.

**Responsibility.** Being responsible is the essence of being durable. When people are aware of their responsibilities, they are able to beat their fears, realize their free will, realize their moral and ethical values, have positive emotions, have realistic optimism, help others, try to find solutions instead of running away from problems, turn negative situations into positive ones, develop their ability to achieve their goals, accept difficulties, learn lessons, work hard, and learn how to deal with stress (Graber, 2004). Frankl (1986) called for courage to face responsibility. Human beings have a fear of escaping from responsibility. However, those who dare to show responsibility may find meaning and dealing with meaning.

### **Techniques for Spiritually Oriented Logotherapy**

Boehm, Golec, Krahn, and Smyth (1999) stated that the following techniques are applied with the support of clients' spirituality and that their benefits have been seen many times. Some of these techniques have been developed by adapting to Harris (1991).

**Self-confidence/belief.** In this technique, the individual sees that he can change something by realizing his/her own power. Good steps to the family, to the environment, or to loved ones will give good results. Thus, at first, the person will see that he has made the change that he does not believe and will realize that the power he or she is looking for exists.

**Visualization.** The purpose of visualization is to imagine and portray the environment in which one feels well and rests by getting rid of troubles. In this technique, the person is removed from disturbing emotions, helping to create stress-reducing images and mental pictures. This technique is quite effective.

**Getting to the center: Exploring the spiritual way.** A person is asked questions with the aim of revealing his or her most powerful spiritual aspects and making it easy for the individual to deal with inconveniences. An example question is, Do you feel that God is with you?

**Improving capability to live.** Individuals are reminded that there are many things in the world that will delight and delight in the world. In every moment of life, one should try to realize that there is something worth living for. Various questions are asked to ensure that people are aware of such things. An example question is, What do you need to do to make your life more enjoyable?

**Finding yourself.** There is a picture or word that comes to mind for every question. The main purpose is for the person to find himself. By utilizing his spiritual powers, he is able to define himself. An example question is, Who are you except yourself?

**Choosing your own duo.** Prayer is an important activity that helps us concentrate our spirit. Our favorite prayer is read again and again. In fact, a different prayer is chosen every time. This prayer can also be created by the person himself, for example, “I am strong, and the strength I carry is stronger and happier with you.”

**Spiritual power awakening.** The main purpose of spiritual power awakening is to find out the strong spiritual aspects that one brings from his past and to use it in the course of therapy.

Example questions: Have you ever had an experience that you would call religious or spiritual? Has this experience influenced your life?

**Creating your own chamber.** The person is presented with the opportunity to organize his own room. The person will visualize a room where he finds peace. In this room the person will feel his own space, color, texture, and air. Through his spiritual experiences, he will try to survive. In this room, he will imagine his strengths and apply them to subsequent processes.

**Combining spirituality and dwelling.** The person will stand in silence and breathe with certain rhythms. The spirit will feel the spirit of the depths. He will quietly listen to his soul and use his four strengths: sensitivity, emotion, perceptions, and connections. He will try to join them together in the spiritual dimension. The main purpose is to ensure that the spirituality and religion that one possesses lead to the realization of the potential power that the individual has created in himself and for the individual to gain confidence.

**Discovering creation.** This step is discovering the talents our spiritual power has. This technique is essentially related to revealing the artistic dimension hidden in our spiritual dimension. We try to find these directions with a few basic processes that are asked. They are then used in the therapy process.

Example: Your childhood (an event in which you are doing something creative). What are your creative aspects in your youth years, your years of adulthood? What does God create and how?



**Integration with a garden.** The individual is told to imagine breathing for a few minutes between plants in a garden and to then touch and feel the garden and plants. The plants talk to the person. After that, the person is asked various questions and their spiritual strengths are discovered.

Example: Which gardens of your life have you noticed with this garden? What happened to you in the garden that makes you sad or gives you peace of mind?

### **Examples of Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy**

#### **Example of Spiritually Oriented Logotherapy for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder**

[Moklebust \(2016\)](#) worked with a client with post-traumatic stress disorder. The work done with this client is briefly summarized as follows: Maria was a 58-year-old mother. Ever since her children got married, she had been having sleep problems. It was decided that her religious dimension was strong and would help her overcome her problems. First, the client's previous treatment was considered. She had already received 13 weeks of CIS treatment and had not seen any benefit. A treatment plan was drawn up that called for Maria be treated by taking advantage of her strengths. The spiritual aspect of logotherapy was addressed with support for religiosity, which was a strong direction for Maria. Maria, who suffered from chronic sleep disturbance, had set the goal and program to solve this problem. [Guttman \(1988\)](#) emphasized that the three dimensions are effective under each condition, but that the solution is spiritual.

#### **Therapeutic targets.**

##### **I. Related to PTSD.**

- A. Increase your sleeping ability.
- B. Reduce anxiety.
- C. Reduce painful memories.

##### **II. About Meaning.**

- A. Improve value awareness.
- B. Increase the perception of meanings for life.
- C. Solve the factors that impede freedom of functioning.
- D. Develop awareness of her behavior and its consequences for herself and others.
- E. Encourage/challenge the perception of options clearly to resolve the problem.
- F. Procurement adaptation and coping with the problem by enhancing, challenging and influencing functioning ([Moklebust, 2016](#)).

**Sessions in brief.** Maria stated that she could not sleep and had not benefited from

her previous treatments; the therapist first helped her by calming her. She realized that Maria's religious orientation was strong, and she went to treatment at this point. Maria loved the five-stage duality her mother had taught her since she was little, but she said she could not do it. The therapist asked Maria to say these prayers at night. After about three sessions, Maria reported that she had fallen asleep without completing the prayers. The therapist emphasized that it is very useful to know the spiritual direction of the client and to offer relevant treatment. As a result, Maria's problem was solved in a very short time with the help of the spiritual power hidden in her from the sleep disorder.

### **Overview of Work Done**

This section will present various examples of studies that can be collected under the name Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy. First, [Chun-Nan \(1993\)](#) conducted a study to determine the consequences of the beliefs in Taiwan and China used in logotherapy. Religious beliefs in China and Taiwan were found to be compatible with logotherapy. Especially for some clients, the results showed a match of close to 100%. In this context, it has been emphasized that Chinese philosophy and religious understanding together with logotherapy are very effective and will yield beneficial results. In addition, [Robatmili et al.'s \(2015\)](#) study titled "The Effects of Group Logotherapy on Meaning and Depression Levels of Persian Students" showed that sessions prepared with Iranian students' spiritual values reduced their levels of depression and improved their academic performance.

[Julom and Guzman \(2013\)](#) conducted a study entitled "The Effectiveness of the Logotherapy Program in Reducing the Feeling of Significance in Patients with Stroke." In the study, activities were made to make meaningful the lives of individuals who had serious physical disabilities. The participants were 16 patients who had fallen into despair and had no anticipation of life. In particular, the idea that they would spend the rest of their lives in heaven affected them in a positive way. At the end of the study, there was a decrease in the sense of meaninglessness in all 16 patients with paralysis, and the program designed with a spiritual perspective was shown to have had a significant effect.

To briefly mention a few of the other studies that have been carried out, [Landau, Kosloff, and Schmeichel \(2011\)](#) showed that belief and spirituality are effective in reducing the anxiety of people exposed to an existential threat in their work. In the same way, the fact that the thought of death dragged the person into a theological quest was also obtained on the basis of the study. [Davis, Juhl, and Routledge \(2011\)](#) found that theological beliefs also reduced the fear of death. Likewise, [Bassett and Going \(2012\)](#) concluded that spirituality was effective at eliminating negative thoughts. [Batson, Schoenrade, and Ventis \(1993\)](#) found that religious beliefs reduced anxiety



about death and increased the prosperity of life. Jonas and Fischer (2006) found that individuals with a strong religiosity in their inner world experienced a lower fear of death. Vail et al. (2010) showed that religion helped protect people from fear of death.

### Conclusion

Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy is centered on meaning as well as the value of spirituality in human life. There are gaps in the individual's life that cannot be replaced when only material values or biological needs are addressed (Bresser, 1993). Certainly, there are spiritual, moral, and ethical values apart from the abovementioned needs. It is not possible to work out the solutions by ignoring these values. Bresser (1993) stated that it is necessary to enter the worlds of these values to understand and find the human. Otherwise, these values, which are always visible, will be constantly queried and examined by new trends. Psychology offers knowledge beyond the physical condition of the person. People have to discover the secrets that drive psychological disturbances. Frankl, one of the representatives of this quest, has pioneered psychotherapy in this regard. Frankl (2014) stated that humans are not merely physical or psychological, but we have a spiritual dimension that completes these two dimensions and is stronger. Moreover, he added that physical and psychological healing is hidden in the spiritual dimension. In this direction, Frankl raised the concepts of unconscious God and unconscious religion and claimed that every person is inwardly in these situations. Pacciolla (1993) emphasized that religiosity or spirituality is an irrefutable fact and that these aspects of people's lives, especially those who carry religious and spiritual items in their lives, should not be ignored. On the contrary, he added, these aspects are important points for a good therapist.

Spiritual Orientation Logotherapy utilizes the spiritual aspects of individuals' lives in finding meaning and organizes sessions on these spiritual aspects in the course of therapy. On this point, despite the work done by Jewish and Christian psychologists, logotherapy has largely left out the input of Muslims. The organization of sessions on completely Islamic concepts and the sharing of the consequences of these sessions will remove the ambiguities in this regard.

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Research Article

# Investigation of the Death Anxiety and Meaning in Life Levels among Middle-Aged Adults

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## Abstract

Life and death constitute a whole, and these concepts become increasingly important in the evaluation of life among middle-aged adults. Therefore, this study investigated the correlation between individual levels of death anxiety and meaning in life in terms of certain variables such as gender, age, educational status, marital status, perceived level of devotment, and witness to death. The sample consisted of 185 individuals (82 males, 103 females; aged 25–55 years) living in Istanbul, Turkey. The data was collected by using a Personal Information Form, the Death Anxiety Scale, and the Meaning in Life Questionnaire. The findings showed that, as the death anxiety and meaning in life subscale levels increased, the meaning in life levels decreased. In addition, it was found that death anxiety does not differ according to the following variables: age (25–35 and 35–55 years), educational status, marital status, perceived religious belief, and living with someone. The results also indicated that women tend to experience more death anxiety than men, and that individuals who witnessed the death of a close person generally feel more death anxiety than those who did not.

## Keywords

Death • Death anxiety • Meaning in life • Adulthood

## Yetişkinlerin Ölüm Kaygısı ve Yaşamı Anlamlandırma Düzeylerinin İncelenmesi

### Öz

Yaşam ve ölüm bir bütünü oluşturmakta, orta yetişkinliğe doğru ilerleyen yıllarda geçirilen ömrün değerlendirme sürecinde bu kavramlar daha fazla önem kazanmaktadır. Bu nedenle, bu araştırmada, bireylerin ölüm kaygı düzeyleri ile yaşam anlamı arasındaki ilişkinin çeşitli değişkenler (cinsiyet, yaş, eğitim durumu, medeni durum, kiminle yaşadığı, algılanan dindarlık düzeyi, ölüme tanık olma) açısından incelenmesi amaçlanmıştır. Örneklem grubu İstanbul'da yaşayan 25–55 yaş arası 185 (82 erkek, 103 kadın) bireyden oluşmaktadır. Araştırmada Kişisel Bilgi Formu, Ölüm Kaygısı Ölçeği ile Yaşamın Anlamı Ölçeği kullanılarak veriler toplanmış ve sonuçlar değerlendirilmiştir. Araştırmadan elde edilen bulgulara göre, yetişkinlik dönemindeki bireylerin ölüm kaygısı düzeyleri arttıkça yaşam anlamı düzeylerinde azalma olduğu, yaşam anlamı alt boyutu olan aranan anlam düzeylerinde de artış olduğu belirlenmiştir. Araştırmanın bağımsız değişkenlerinin ölüm kaygısı puanlarıyla yapılan analizleri sonucunda elde edilen bulgulara göre; ölüm kaygısının yaşa (25–35 yaş, 35–55 yaş), eğitim durumuna, medeni durumuna, algılanan dini inanç düzeyine ve bireyin yalnız yaşayıp yaşamamasına göre farklılaşmadığı tespit edilmiştir. Bununla beraber, kadınların erkeklerden daha fazla ölüm kaygısı yaşadığı ve yakın birinin ölümüne tanık olan bireylerde daha yoğun ölüm kaygısı yaşandığı tespit edilmiştir.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Ölüm • Ölüm kaygısı • Yaşamın anlamı • Yetişkinlik

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The years from young to middle adulthood is considered as a period in which one's life is evaluated, previous experiences are given a meaning, and more realistic plans are made for the future. Although the thought of life coming to an end is not at the forefront, death anxiety tends to emerge among certain individuals in this time period. For some, death means that life will end and various hopes and desires will remain unfulfilled.

The phenomenon of death has been dealt with in many psychological theories, especially in the context of the evaluation and meaning of life, and it has played an important role in the process of understanding and evaluating humans in general. In regard to the inner drive that guides human behaviors, Sigmund Freud mentioned two basic instincts: the death instinct, which expresses destructive thoughts; and the life instinct, which represents the continuity of life. By expressing that the purpose of life is death, Freud considered that, in every human being, there is the desire to die without consciousness (Geçtan, 2005). Death anxiety is one of the most important concerns of the upper self, and such anxiety is thought to play an effective role in psychopathology and psychosomatic diseases (Freud, 1992). Carl Jung, on the other hand, suggested that, since the fear of life underlies the anxiety of death, one who fears death is actually afraid of life (Jung, 1997). In general, existentialist philosophers and psychologists have argued that death anxiety is an inevitable anxiety that exists in the depths of individual egos, without reaching the conscious level (Geçtan, 1990). Yalom (2001) argued that the inevitable is not death anxiety, but death itself. He also pointed out that, in order to deal with death anxiety, one must face death, recognize death, and understand death (Yalom, 2001). According to existentialists, every inner life must ultimately come to terms with the finiteness of life and confront the question of "What is the meaning of life?" According to Tanhan (2007), the way in which an individual is able to remove such anxiety is that he/she lives in the presence of death and discovers the meaning of life.

Meaning refers to a network of connections, implications, and translations that help us become more aware of our existence in the world. Meaning also makes us feel that our lives are important and our existence is not simply based on seconds, days, months, and years (Akn & Taş, 2015). Although there are many different concepts, according to some viewpoints, life and death constitute a whole. As Kalaoglu Öztürk (2010) indicated, death is the aim of life and it completes life. Meanwhile, death anxiety has been defined as a multi-dimensional concept. The most emphasized aspects have included: fear of uncertainty and loneliness; fear of losing one's relatives; fear of losing one's identity; fear of punishment after death; worry about the ones left behind; fear of losing control; fear of suffering; loss of body; and fear of extinction (Karaca, 2000). Ünver (1938) found that the Turkish people do not fear death and they have accepted that death is inevitable. However, other studies have shown that the meaning of death for adults can differ from that of children and adolescents. In addition, various concepts, such as one's culture, belief system, and lifestyle, can affect an individual's feelings about death (Sezer & Saya, 2009).



According to [Levinson \(1986\)](#), the period from ages 17 to 45 is referred to as the “first period of adulthood.” This is a time when life satisfaction is generally high in terms of sexuality, love, family life, professional progression, and creativity, despite certain contradictions such as stress, risk, and frustration ([Levinson, 1986](#); [Havighurst, 1972](#)) as well as unfulfilled desires and expectations. Middle adulthood is in the 40–65 age range; that is, between middle and advanced age. In this period, a biological pause and regression can occur for an individual, while he/she continues a psychologically satisfying life.

By their late 30s and early 40s, most individuals generally realize their dreams in life and ideally find a balance between work and life ([Erikson, 1984](#); [Onur, 2000](#); [Levinson, 1986](#)). Together with the search for the meaning in life, feelings, and thoughts about death can emerge during this period. Numerous studies have focused on the variables of death anxiety and the meaning in life among young adults. [Galt and Hayslip \(1998\)](#) reported that the anxiety levels of the elderly were higher than those among younger adults. More specifically, they compared 46 individuals (aged 17–25 years) with 40 individuals (aged 60 and older), and found that the levels of death anxiety among the latter were higher than those of the former. [Şenol \(1989\)](#) found that the anxiety and fear levels of the elderly were generally in the middle range, while the levels of death anxiety showed differences according to age group. In this regard, the highest levels of death anxiety were observed in the 60–64 age range, with lower levels found among those aged 70 and older. [Reker and Fry \(2003\)](#) investigated the meaning of life levels among 163 young adults (mean age of 21) and 144 older adults (a mean age of 70), and found that there was no significant difference between the two age groups. [Yüksel \(2013\)](#) examined the relationship between the meaning of life and independent variables among young adults, and found that the meaning of life does not differ in terms of gender, perceived socio-economic level, and parental togetherness (or separation). However, the meaning of life among young adults can significantly differ in terms of perceived parental attitude and position in birth order. Finally, [Taş \(2011\)](#) found that, although there was no significant difference between male and female teachers and their respective ages, the former generally performed more meaning of life searches than their female counterparts.

From young adulthood and on, the perceptions of human life and the search for meaning can change along life’s responsibilities. In addition, the meaning attributed to events in life can change in the context of one’s personality, previous experiences, and the ability to accept and cope with certain problems. By the end of this period, men tend to take a pause, while women generally focus on family, work, and friendships. Regardless of gender, it is necessary to establish a stable and integrated life structure in which the individual learns more about his/her role in society and acts accordingly. According to [Levinson \(1996\)](#), by managing a family and fulfilling





social responsibilities, one can enjoy life. However, certain problems encountered during young adulthood may be more difficult to deal with in middle adulthood, due to the changing roles, life responsibilities, and burdens. Previous studies have shown that, the moral and material burdens of older adults, including the loss of close family members and friends, and the onset of andropause or menopause, may cause one to question the meaning of life and experience death anxiety (Blazer, 1973; Combs, 1981; Ka-Ying Hui & Fung, 2008; Martindale, 1998; Prager, 1997; Rappaport, Fossler, Bross, & Gilden, 1993; Russac, Gatliff, Reece, & Spootswood, 2007).

Successful young and middle-aged adults appear to be more loving, tolerant, and mature, while maintaining a life that is free from internal conflicts. In contrast, those that fail to achieve such aspects tend to see life as difficult, unpleasant, and pointless (Levinson, 1996; Erikson, 1984). Thus, it is important to evaluate this period of adulthood by considering various cultures and characteristics among different age groups. In practice, it is believed that experts in the field of mental health generally provide psychological help for adults, especially in the context of protective and preventive mental health functions. Based on this perspective, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the correlation between individual levels of death anxiety and meaning in life in terms of certain variables such as gender, age, educational status, marital status, perceived level of devoutness, and witness to death. In addition, the research questions are presented as follows:

- (i) Do the death anxiety scores of individuals in adulthood significantly predict their meaning in life scores?
- (ii) Do the meaning in life scores of individuals in adulthood differ in terms of age, gender, marital status, educational status, living with someone, perceived level of devoutness, and witness to death?
- (iii) Do the death anxiety scores of individuals in adulthood differ in terms of age, gender, marital status, educational status, living with someone, perceived level of devoutness, and witness to death?

## **Method**

### **Research Model**

This study investigated the relationship between the levels of death anxiety and meaning in life among a sample of individuals (aged 25 and older) living in Istanbul, Turkey. For this purpose, the correlational survey model, which aims to determine the existence and/or the degree of change between two or more variables (Balci, 2005; Karasar, 2012), was applied.

## Sample

The participants in this study, selected through random sampling, consisted of 185 individuals (82 males and 103 females; aged 25–55 years,  $\bar{X} = 32.08$ ,  $SD = 8.66$ ) living in Istanbul during the 2015–2016 academic year. In regard to age, 47 (57.3%) males were aged 25–35 years, with 35 (42.7%) over 35 years of age, while 73 (70.9%) females were aged 25–35 years, with 30 (29.1%) aged 35–55 years. Regarding educational status, 52 (28%) had “no university degree,” 99 (54%) had an “undergraduate degree,” and 34 (18%) had a “graduate degree.” Concerning marital status, 86 (46%) were “single,” while 99 (54%) were “married.” However, 69 (37%) of them lived “alone,” while 116 (63%) lived “with family.” According to the data from the Personal Information Form, 36 (19%) were “devout,” 49 (26%) were “somewhat devout,” 30 (16%) were “hesitant,” 59 (32%) were “pretty devout,” and 11 (6%) were “very devout.” Finally, 73 (39%) stated that they had witnessed death, while 112 (61%) did not witness death in the past.

## Data Collection Tools

In this study, the “Meaning in Life Scale” was used to determine the meaning in life levels among the individuals, while the “Death Anxiety Scale” was used to determine the levels of death anxiety. The Personal Information Form was prepared by the researcher and it was used to obtain demographic information about the individuals. The details regarding the data collection tools are as follows.

**Death Anxiety Scale (DAS):** This scale was developed by Templer in 1970 and it consists of 15 yes or no questions, with a maximum of 15 points. For example, if the first nine questions are marked as “YES” and the last six questions are marked as “NO,” then the participant receives 1 point for each item, after which the high score indicates that there is a high level of death anxiety. The scale consists of statements that express feelings of anxiety, fear, and horror in relation to death. The reliability and validity of the Turkish version of the DAS was measured by face validity and the test-retest method with a sample of university students. Since the reliability coefficient of the scale was  $r = .86$  ( $p < .001$ ), it can be stated that this version of the DAS is compatible with the original scale and that it is a valid tool for determining the level of death anxiety (Şenol, 1989).

**The Meaning in Life Questionnaire (MLQ):** This scale, developed by Steger, Frazier, Oishi, and Kaler (2006), assesses individuals’ understanding of the meaning in life. This scale was previously used by researchers in Turkey to assess the psychometric properties of individuals among various age groups (Sezer, 2012). It consists of 10 expressions about the meaning in life, based on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “Absolutely Wrong” to “Absolutely Right.” Overall, there are nine positive items (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 10) and one negative item (9). The scale consists of two subscales as

presence of meaning (items 1, 4, 5, 6, 9) and search for meaning (items 2, 3, 7, 8, 10). The range of scores varies from 7 to 70. High scores from subscales of the scale indicate that the individual possesses a high level of specificity for that subscale. Steger et al. (2006) found that the internal consistency reliability coefficient of the MLQ was .82 for the presence of meaning subscale, and .87 for the search for meaning subscale. After four weeks, they found the reliability coefficients for the same subscales respectively as .70 and .73 (Demirdağ & Kalafat, 2015). In a similar scale validation study, correlations between the MLQ and the Originality Scale were measured and it was found that the meaning in life was positively related to originality. These correlations are an important evidence for the convergent validity of the scale (Akm & Taş, 2015).

*Personal Information Form;* It was prepared by the researchers with the help of expert opinions in order to collect data on the independent variables of the research. In this form, some answers were search for for questions such as age, gender, educational status, marital status, perceived religious belief level, witness to death of the individuals that constitutes the sample group of the research.

## Data analysis

The Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used to determine the normal distribution of the data that obtained from for statistical analysis. The data was analyzed by using the SPSS 16.0 statistical program, after which Pearson's correlation coefficient, the independent group t-test, and the analysis of variance (ANOVA) were employed.

## Findings

This section discusses the findings in relation to the three aforementioned research questions. The findings of the first research question ("Do the death anxiety scores individuals in adulthood significantly predict their meaning in life scores?") are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1  
*Results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Controlling the Normal Distribution of the DAS, Meaning of Life, and Subscale Scores*

	$X_{\min}$	$X_{\max}$	$\bar{X}$	$X_{\text{Std.Dev.}}$	Skewness	Kurtosis
Death Anxiety Scale	1	15	8.03	3.01	-0.02	-0.56
Presence of Meaning	5	35	26.85	6.30	-0.88	0.49
Search for Meaning	5	35	23.00	8.06	-0.64	-0.30
Meaning in Life Total	14	70	49.75	10.66	-0.46	0,38

As shown in Table 1, as a result of one sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov analysis which was used to determine whether the distribution of the death anxiety scale and meaning in life scale scores of the individuals constituting the sample group was significant, there found to be a significant difference ( $p < ,05$ ).

Table 2

*Pearson Analysis Results for Determining the Correlation Between the scores of Death Anxiety and Meaning in Life & its subscales*

	Death Anxiety Scale
Presence of Meaning	-0,062
Search for Meaning	0,003
Meaning in Life Total	-0,031*

\* $p < .05$

As shown in Table 2, Pearson Product Moment Correlations were computed in order to determine whether there was a significant relationship between the scores of death anxiety scale and the meaning in life scale scores of the individuals constituting the sample group. It was found that there was a negative correlation between the meaning in life and death anxiety ( $p < ,05$ ). In these premises, as the death anxiety increases, the meaning in life decreases. On the other hand death anxiety was found non-significantly related to presence of meaning and search for meaning.

Table 3

*Simple linear regression analysis results related to Adults' Death Anxiety Scale Scores based on Meaning in Life*

Score	$\beta$	$t$	$p$	$R^2$	F	$p$
Regression Coefficient	8,46	7,97	.000			
Meaning in Life	-.009	-.42	.678	.001	.172	.678

As shown in Table 3, death anxiety is the dependent variable, while the meaning in life is the independent variable. The independent variable explains approximately 0.1% of the change in the dependent variable ( $R^2 = .001$ ). In addition, the linear regression model used for the dependent variable and the independent variable was not statistically significant ( $F = .172, p > .05$ ), and there was no predictive power in the meaning in life variable on the death anxiety variable ( $t = -.42, p > .05$ ).

According to Table 4, the difference between the presence of meaning subscale and variables, such as marital status and living with someone, was significant ( $t = -2.30, p < 0.05$ ;  $t = -3.34, p < 0.01$ ). In other words, it was determined that individuals who are married and living with their family have higher satisfaction from their current lifestyles. However, the difference between the meaning in life, the subscale of the presence of meaning, and the witness to death was significant ( $t = 2.00, p < 0.05$ ;  $t = 2.95, p < 0.05$ ); that is, individuals who witness death are more satisfied with their lives. However, there was no significant difference between the meaning in life subscales in terms of age and gender ( $p > .05$ ).



Table 4

*Results of the Independent Group T-Test on the Meaning in Life and Subscale Scores in terms of Age, Gender, Marital Status, Living with Someone, and Witness to Death*

	N		X	sd.	t	df.	p
Age Groups							
Presence of Meaning	120	25-35	26.43	6.45	-1.245	183	0.215
	65	35-55	27.63	5.98			
Search for Meaning	120	25-35	23.48	7.67	1.109	183	0.269
	65	35-55	22.11	8.73			
Meaning in Life Total	120	25-35	49.75	10.17	0.007	183	0.994
	65	35-55	49.74	11.60			
Gender							
Presence of Meaning	82	Male	27.15	6.78	0.573	183	0.568
	103	Female	26.61	5.91			
Search for Meaning	82	Male	23.10	8.78	0.146	183	0.884
	103	Female	22.92	7.48			
Meaning in Life Total	82	Male	50.24	11.68	0.566	183	0.572
	103	Female	49.35	9.82			
Marital Status							
Presence of Meaning	86	Single	25.72	6.54	-2.297	183	0.023*
	99	Married	27.83	5.94			
Search for Meaning	86	Single	24.16	7.62	1.840	183	0.067
	99	Married	21.99	8.33			
Meaning in Life Total	86	Single	49.78	10.34	0.039	183	0.969
	99	Married	49.72	10.99			
Living with Someone							
Presence of Meaning	69	Alone	24.90	6.83	-3.337	183	0.001**
	116	With family	28.01	5.68			
Search for Meaning	69	Alone	23.74	8.16	0.962	183	0.338
	116	With family	22.56	8.01			
Meaning in Life Total	69	Alone	48.64	11.01	-1.091	183	0.277
	116	With family	50.41	10.44			
Witness to Death							
Presence of Meaning	73	Yes	28.51	5.76	2.952	183	0.004**
	112	No	25.77	6.42			
Search for Meaning	73	Yes	23.29	8.59	0.391	183	0.696
	112	No	22.81	7.73			
Meaning in Life Total	73	Yes	51.67	10.10	1.999	183	0.047*
	112	No	48.49	10.88			

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

Table 5

*ANOVA Results for Identifying whether the Meaning in Life and its Subscales Differ depending on Educational Status*

		Sum of squares	df.	Mean square	F	p		$\bar{X}$	Sd.
Presence of Meaning	Between groups	88.11	2	44.05	1.112	0.331	No university	25.81	7.09
	Within groups	7207.66	182	39.60			Undergraduate	27.41	5.37
	Total	7295.76	184				Graduate	26.79	7.43
Search for Meaning	Between groups	209.96	2	104.98	1.626	0.200	No university	21.58	8.68
	Within groups	11750.04	182	64.56			Undergraduate	23.15	8.01
	Total	11960.00	184				Graduate	24.74	7.02
Meaning in Life Total	Between groups	484.04	2	242.02	2.156	0.119	No university	47.19	12.50
	Within groups	20435.02	182	112.28			Undergraduate	50.57	9.86
	Total	20919.06	184				Graduate	51.26	9.43

According to Table 5, there was no significant difference between the meaning in life and its subscale scores, as a result of the ANOVA ( $p > .05$ ).

The findings of the third research question (“Do the death anxiety scores of individuals in adulthood differ in terms of age, gender, marital status, educational status, living with someone, perceived level of devoutness, and witness to death?”) are presented in Tables 6, 7, and 8.

Table 6  
Results for Identifying Whether the Meaning in Life and its Subscales Differ depending on the Perceived Level of Devoutness

	N	Groups	N	$\bar{X}$	$\chi^2$	df	p
Presence of Meaning	36	Not devout	36	63.29	27.589	4	0.001**
	49	Somewhat devout	49	79.41			
	30	Hesitant	30	97.17			
	59	Pretty devout	59	115.00			
	11	Very devout	11	121.41			
	185	Total	185				
Search for Meaning	36	Not devout	36	88.14	7.164	4	0.127
	49	Somewhat devout	49	89.91			
	30	Hesitant	30	83.17			
	59	Pretty devout	59	96.53			
	11	Very devout	11	130.59			
	185	Total	185				
Meaning in Life Total	36	Not devout	36	71.85	17.872	4	0.001**
	49	Somewhat devout	49	84.49			
	30	Hesitant	30	88.68			
	59	Pretty devout	59	107.52			
	11	Very devout	11	134.05			
	185	Total	185				

\*\* $p < .01$

According to Table 6, there was a significant difference between the meaning in life and its subscale scores in terms of the perceived level of devoutness, as a result of the Kruskal-Wallis H Test ( $\chi^2 = 27.589$ ;  $p < .01$ ;  $\chi^2 = 17.872$ ;  $p < .01$ ). In addition, the mean scores of the perceived level of devoutness differed in regard to the levels of “pretty devout” and “very devout,” whereas the scores were closer to one another in relation to other levels.

Table 7

*Death Anxiety and the Results of the Independent Group T-Test in Terms of the Age, Gender, Marital Status, Educational Status, Living with Someone, Perceived Level of Devoutness, and Witness to Death*

	N		$\bar{X}$	sd.	T	df.	P
Age Groups							
Death Anxiety	120	25–35	8.23	2.91	1.182	183	0.239
	65	35–55	7.68	3.18			
Gender							
Death Anxiety	82	Male	7.24	3.04	-3.257	183	0.001**
	103	Female	8.66	2.86			
Marital status							
Death Anxiety	86	Single	8.05	2.78	0.059	183	0.953
	99	Married	8.02	3.22			
Living with someone							
Death Anxiety	69	Alone	8.22	2.92	0.643	183	0.521
	116	With family	7.92	3.07			
Witness to death							
Death Anxiety	73	Yes	7.42	3.03	-2.238	183	0.026*
	112	No	8.43	2.95			

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$

According to Table 7, there was a significant difference between the death anxiety scores and gender, particularly among the females in the sample ( $t = -3.26$ ;  $p < 0.01$ ). In other words, the level of death anxiety among the females was greater than that among the males. Moreover, the difference between the death anxiety and witness to death variables was also significant ( $t = -2.24$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ); that is, the level of death anxiety was higher among those who did not witness death.

Table 8

*Results of the ANOVA for Identifying Whether the Death Anxiety Scores Differ depending on Education Level*

		Sum of squares	df.	Mean square	F	p	$\bar{X}$	Sd.	
Death Anxiety Scores	Between groups	11.92	2	5.96	0.653	0,522	No university	8.12	3.33
	Within groups	1659.89	182	9.12			Undergraduate	8.17	3.01
	Total	1671.81	184				Graduate	7.50	2.50

As shown in Table 8, there was no significant difference between education level and the death anxiety scores, as a result of the ANOVA ( $p > .05$ ).

Table 9

*Results of the Kruskal-Wallis H Test for Identifying Whether Death Anxiety Scores Differ depending on the Perceived Level of Devoutness*

Scores	Groups	N	$\bar{X}_{sıra}$	$\chi^2$	sd	p
Death Anxiety	Not devout	36	97.86	2.718	4	0.606
	Somewhat devout	49	84.52			
	Hesitant	30	102.10			
	Pretty devout	59	91.04			
	Very devout	11	100.55			
	Total	185				

As shown in Table 9, there was no significant difference between the perceived level of devoutness and the death anxiety scores, as a result of the Kruskal-Wallis H Test ( $\chi^2 = 2.718$ ;  $p > .05$ ).

## Discussion

This study investigated the levels of death anxiety and meaning in life among a sample of middle-aged adults. It also determined whether there was a correlation between death anxiety and the meaning in life in terms of variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational status, living with someone, perceived level of devoutness, and witness to death. The results showed that, as the death anxiety and meaning in life subscale levels increased, the meaning in life levels decreased. This also supports the idea that individuals begin to examine the meaning in life, as a result of facing the idea of death (Geçtan, 2005; Sigrist, 2015). The results of previous studies are in accordance with this finding. Lyke (2013) examined the correlation between the meaning in life and the fear of death among 168 young adults, and found that only the search for the meaning in life was significantly related to the fear of death. Routledge and Juhl (2010) revealed that, among a group of 60 psychology students, those with high death anxiety were the weakest in terms of searching for the meaning in life. In their study of 26 metaphorical perceptions of death, Ross and Pollio (1991) determined that those who had negative metaphors related to death had difficulty searching for the meaning in life, while those who had positive metaphors about death enriched their search for such meaning by making more diverse transformations in their lives. According to the study's independent variables, death anxiety did not differ in terms of age (25–35 years, and 35 years and older), educational status, marital status, perceived level of devoutness, and whether the individual lived alone. However, it was found that women had greater death anxiety than men, and those who witnessed the death of a close relative had greater death anxiety in general.

Previous studies also indicated that the level of death anxiety did not differ in terms of age (Hökeleki, 1991; Kasar, Karaman, Şahin, Yıldırım, & Aykar, 2016; Yıldız, 1998). Contrary to these findings, Thorson and Powell (1988) and Henrie and Hicks-Patrick (1970) found that the elderly experienced less death anxiety than younger individuals, since their conflict-resolving and anxiety-coping skills were better. Russac, Gatliff, Reece, and Spotswood (2007) investigated the relationship between death anxiety and the variables of age and gender in their study of 304 individuals (aged 18–87 years) living in the United States. They found that the level of death anxiety in both males and females diminished after 20 years of age. However, the level of death anxiety among females reappeared in their 50s. In order to test these findings, they administered the DAS to 113 females between the ages of 18 and 85. The findings indicated that hormonal changes, such as menopause, directly affected



the mental experiences and the level of death anxiety among older females. Since the sample in the present study consisted of individuals 25–35 years of age, this can explain why there was no difference between the death anxiety scores and age.

However, it was determined that education level, marital status, living with someone or living alone, and perceived level of devoutness did not differ in terms of death anxiety. Similarly, [Cole \(1979\)](#) found that education level, marital status, and perceived level of devoutness were not related to death anxiety, and that single men experienced greater death anxiety than single women. [Şenol \(1989\)](#) found that education level did not affect death anxiety, while [Yıldız \(1998\)](#) found that marital status was not related to death anxiety. Conversely, [Hökelekli \(1991\)](#) conducted a study on the relationship between death-related attitudes and religious behaviors among 378 undergraduate students (aged 24–60 years) from different professions. In the study, it was observed that age was not a determinant of death anxiety, whereas there was a significant positive correlation between death-related attitudes and religious devoutness. [Henrie and Hick-Patrick \(1970\)](#) found that death anxiety was related to the perceived level of devoutness in a negative way, while positively related to religious suspicion, based on the data from 635 young, middle-aged, and elderly individuals. Moreover, [Alvarado, Templer, Bresler, and Thomas-Dobson \(1995\)](#), in their study of 200 individuals, found that those with high levels of religious beliefs and those who believed in life after death had less death anxiety.

The present study also found that women experienced greater death anxiety compared to men. The findings of previous studies are in accordance with this result ([Henrie & Hick-Patrick, 1970](#); [Karadelioğlu, 2011](#); [Rutledge & Juhl, 2010](#); [Thorson & Powell, 1988](#); [Yıldız, 1998](#)). In addition, death anxiety levels were found to be higher among witnesses to death ([Azaiza, Ron, Shoham, & Tinsky-Roimi, 2011](#); [Ka-YingHui & Fung, 2008](#)), whereas some studies have revealed that death anxiety does not differ in terms of this variable ([Cole, 1979](#); [Tanrıdağ, 1997](#)). In addition, it was reported that health professionals were less likely to experience death anxiety ([Cooper & Barnett, 2005](#); [Sharma, Monsen, & Gary, 1997](#)), which may eventually result in a resistance to witnessing death and perceiving this as a natural part of life ([Acehan & Eker, 2013](#); [Kara, 2002](#)).

Based on the statistical analysis of the meaning in life scale, it was determined that the variables of age, gender, and education level differ in terms of the meaning in life and its subscales, whereas they do not differ in terms of other variables such as marital status, living with someone or living alone, witness to death, and perceived level of devoutness. However, previous studies have indicated that the meaning in life did not differ in terms of age, gender and educational status ([Reker & Fry, 2003](#), [Scannell, Ailen, & Burton, 2002](#); [Yüksel, 2012](#)). Finally, [Taş \(2011\)](#) found that the meaning in life significantly differed in terms of marital status, while [Yarkin \(2013\)](#) indicated that individuals who did not live alone and were in a relationship had more satisfaction in life.

The present study found that the meaning in life differed in terms of the perceived level of devoutness. Topuz (2016) found in his study of 328 undergraduate students that religious consciousness (religious value and religious behavioral dimensions) and education were effective in explaining the meaning in life, but there was a negative and significant correlation between the meaning in life and religious consciousness. In this case, as the level of religious consciousness increased, the need to search for a new meaning in life decreased. Consequently, religion contributed to the attainment of the meaning in life in young adults and directed them according to normative religious information. In his work, Yılmaz (2013) focused on the importance of religious coping when solving psychological, sociological, and physiological problems, besides making recommendations on the contents and methods of religious education activities that center on such problems. In addition, Zika and Chamberlain (1992) found low levels of correlation between spirituality and the meaning in life.

The present study also determined that the witness to death variable was related to the meaning in life. In this regard, the results of previous studies support this finding. Taubman-Ben-Ari, and Weintraub (2008), in their study of 66 nurses and 50 doctors working in pediatric oncology, found that having high optimism and high professional self-esteem as well as witnessing the death of patients influenced the relationship between the meaning in life and personal development. Häusler, Gellert, Deeken, Rapp, and Nordheim (2016) found that health professionals working with dementia patients and their supportive relatives developed more coping skills, which, in turn, improved their quality of life and reduced their levels of stress.

In sum, the present study revealed that, as the death anxiety and meaning in life subscale levels increased, the meaning in life levels decreased. One of the most important findings was that spiritual tendencies positively affected the search for meaning in life and that such tendencies were directly related to the life satisfaction of adults. According to Tekin (2016), the spiritual tendencies of individuals can help them become more aware of the positive aspects of life, while allowing them to cope with certain problems along the way. Considering the importance of spiritual tendencies in late adulthood, it is possible that spiritual-based psychological services can help individuals cope with death anxiety as well as guide them on their search for the meaning in life.

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Research Article

# The Role of Islam in Preventing Domestic Violence towards Muslim Women in Azerbaijan

Nazila Isgandarova<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

This is a qualitative research study that addresses the problem of domestic violence perpetrated on pregnant women in Azerbaijani society to discover whether pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan who are subjected to domestic violence find the role of Islam helpful in tackling the violence against them. Although this study is descriptive in its nature and the findings from the data are limited to the research participants only, a dire need exists for further study in this area to identify and eliminate the risk factors pregnant women face in Azerbaijan. The results suggest that domestic violence against pregnant women is significantly reduced during pregnancy. However, some cultural and religious factors play a significant role in reducing or increasing the incidence of violence against pregnant women. For example, the Azerbaijani government recently adopted several measures to tackle violence against women. Nevertheless, applying progressive Islamic teachings can increase the moral and spiritual values of these social, educational, and legal initiatives in tackling domestic violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan.

## Keywords

Domestic violence • Pregnancy • Islam • Culture • Tradition • Azerbaijan

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The Republic of Azerbaijan's law, "On Combatting Domestic Violence" (1058-IIIQ, 2010), defines domestic violence as any physical, psychological, economic, or sexual violence that inflicts "physical or emotional damage" on women. Domestic violence is an act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual, or psychological harm or suffering for women, including threats of such acts, coercion, or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life (United Nations, 1993). Any women can be at risk of a wide range of abuses such as: (a) physical, sexual, or psychological violence occurring in the family (i.e., battery; sexual abuse of female children in the household; dowry-related violence; marital rape, mutilation, or other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence; and violence related to exploitation); (b) physical, sexual, or psychological violence occurring within the general community; and (c) physical, sexual, or psychological violence perpetrated or condoned by the State wherever it occurs (e.g., forced sterilization, forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide, and prenatal sex selection; United Nations General Assembly, 1993).

Domestic violence against women recognizes no limits with respect to race, nationality, socioeconomic status, or religion. Today, domestic violence against pregnant women is a significant religious/spiritual/moral, cultural, and social problem in Azerbaijan. Because the majority of Azerbaijanis identifies with being Muslim, progressive Islamic teachings can act as a protective factor against the domestic violence being perpetrated against pregnant Muslim women and enhance the psychological, moral, and spiritual effectiveness of interventions in the face of domestic violence.

The purpose of this research study is to discover whether pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan who are subjected to domestic violence find the role of Islam helpful in tackling the violence against them. The main questions that guide this research are: What are the reasons for domestic violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan, and what cultural and religious factors in the Islamic tradition play an important role in reducing (or increasing) the incidence of abuse against pregnant women in Azerbaijan?

### **The Context of the Study**

Although the specific literature on violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan is relatively limited, the available data from international non-governmental organizations and governmental agencies provide reliable information about this kind of violence. For example, a review of government initiatives suggests that the government of Azerbaijan has given priority to preventing violence against women by initiating certain measures such as modifications to family laws, abortion, and more. These laws include Articles 12, 25, and 34 of the Constitution (Republic of

Azerbaijan, 1995; Huseynova, 2015), which declare full equality between men and women (including within marriage), “Combating Trafficking in Human Beings” (958-IIQ, 2005), “On Providing Gender Equality” (150-IIIG, 2006), and “On Amendments to the Family Code” (2011). The government has also joined UN Conventions such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). Also, the government established the State Committee on Women’s Issues, later renamed the State Committee on Family, Women, and Children’s Affairs (SCFWCA), to promote women’s rights in the family, society, and workplace, to promote progressive family values that tackle violence against women, and to eliminate gender-based discrimination.

With respect to domestic violence, the “Law on Combating Domestic Violence” (1058-IIIQ, 2010), which the Azerbaijani government adopted, also addresses issues such as how to improve the conditions of education and employment for women as a tool for tackling domestic violence. In 2011, the Azerbaijani government also criminalized sex-selective abortion as one form of domestic violence against women and girls, modifying Article 1.0.6 of Law 1058-IIIQ to criminalize non-consensual sex, along with Sections 149–153 of the *Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Crimes* to amend the minimum age of marriage for men and women to 18.

Despite being progressive implementations, these laws lack enforcement for protecting women subjected to domestic violence (CEDAW, 2009). Nevertheless, more state programs for preventing violence against women are expected to be introduced with the implementation of *Azerbaijan – 2020: Vision into the Future*.

### **Literature Review: Key Concepts**

The specific literature on violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan is relatively limited. However, a dire need exists to study the risk and protective aspect of Islam in relationships where domestic violence against pregnant women occurs. This section presents literature that addresses the facts in Azerbaijani about domestic violence and its various aspects, in particular the risk and protective factors of Islam, domestic violence against pregnant women, and controversial interpretations versus gender-inclusive interpretations from Islamic sources that increase or decrease the likelihood of tackling domestic violence against women.

### **The Prevalence of Domestic Violence in Azerbaijan**

The general literature highlights multiple risk factors including cultural ones that make it difficult to tackle domestic violence in Azerbaijan. For example, one of the reasons for the difficulty in predicting how many Muslim women are subjected to domestic violence relates to the cultural phenomenon of shame and pride, as well as the reluctance of



caregivers and police to help women report domestic violence. This discourages women and their families from reporting spousal violence, including rape and other forms of violence against women (Karat, 2011). For example, according to the [U.S. Department of State 2013 report](#), some officials and caregivers, including doctors, nurses, social workers, religious leaders, and more, emphasize family unity and mediating disputes rather than protecting women and their children from violence and abuse (Karat, 2011). Therefore, that some caregivers and police officers refuse to deal with cases of domestic violence makes it difficult for women to report and normalize the reporting of domestic violence against women. Furthermore, as there is no single law on spousal rape, getting precise statistical information about this form of violence against women and how many violent husbands have been prosecuted for this crime is difficult. International reports also bring forth the relationship between domestic violence and other forms of violence such as female trafficking; forced labor; the economic and financial exploitation of women; sex-selective abortions; marginalization of internally displaced women; and violence against women in early, forced, and unregistered marriages (Manjoo, 2013).

**Islam and domestic violence.** Traditionally, the majority of the Azerbaijani population adheres to the Islamic faith (Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 2009). As most of these followers are not practicing Muslims, Islamic sources are misinterpreted in order to preserve hierarchical traditional family units, which in turn perpetuate violence against women. For example, the Islamic ritual of *kabin* (marriage contract) is used to normalize young marriages (Karat, 2011). In other cases, misogynistic interpretations of the Qur'an and hadiths are used to encourage Azerbaijani women to practice self-sacrifice for the sake of family unity and their husbands' reputations in the family and society. Therefore, taking into consideration the value attached to Islamic faith, this section highlights an Islamic approach to domestic violence and the controversial and egalitarian interpretations of Islam's two fundamental sources: the Qur'an and hadiths.

One misunderstanding of the Islamic faith comes from extreme adherence to the classical pre-modern exegetical tradition without taking into consideration the socio-political and historical context that sanctified men's dominance over women. Uncritical acceptance of pre-modern Islamic sources endorses the belief that a husband is responsible for his wife in many dimensions (i.e., providing the dowry [*mahr*] and support [*nafaqah*] for a wife's basic needs). However, in return, the wife has to fulfill her wifely duties and be obedient (*ta'ah*) to her husband. If a wife refuses to be obedient to her husband, the traditional Muslim law and local customs present her as a disobedient wife (*nashiz*). Based on their understanding of the Qur'an (4:34), some practicing Muslim men might choose the pre-modern prescription to discipline the disobedient wife by first advising and admonishing her, secondly by separating the beds, and finally by physically beating her (*daraba*).

The contemporary egalitarian investigation of traditional Muslim laws, exegesis, and other sources, however, question how a disobedient wife should be treated (Ali, 2006; Barazangi, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Chaudhry, 2014; Mernissi, 1987; Wadud, 1999). They offer the best choice of controversial Qur'anic words, such as *daraba* and *nushuz*. There are some Muslim scholars (Abugideiri, 2012; Alwani, 2007) who even argue that no Muslim scholar has ever endorsed wife-beating or any form of abuse acceptable or permissible in the sense that contemporary Azerbaijani Muslims understand it. In addition to religious factors, Abugideiri (2012) suggested considering a variety of financial, cultural, and individual factors that contribute to domestic violence before assessing individuals and families.

In summary, although domestic violence is related to many other issues, the extreme influence of certain misogynistic approaches to Islamic exegetical and jurisprudence traditions on Muslims' understanding of domestic violence is difficult to ignore. Therefore, many Muslim female scholars (Ali, 2006; Barazangi, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Chaudhry, 2014; Mernissi, 1987; Wadud, 1999) have evaluated the influence of patriarchal readings of the Qur'an (4:34; 4:128) along with addressing other factors that contribute to domestic violence against Muslim women. According to these scholars, for example, pre-modern Muslim scholars rightly concluded that the Qur'an offers various steps for disciplining an act of disobedience (*nushuz*). However, their interpretations of female behaviors that are disobedient serve men's interests and do not include women's perspectives. Also, the pre-modern classification of female disobedience blames women for practically everything, ranging from leaving the marital home without her husband's permission, to not fulfilling her husband's sexual needs, and acting disrespectfully towards her husband, failing to perform religious obligations; all are considered evil and/or inconsistent with the character of a God-fearing woman. Therefore, through their gender-inclusive interpretations, egalitarian Muslim scholars argue that based on the pre-modern prescription, disciplining a wife for her bad behavior is not only justified but believed to be a religious duty. For these reasons, pre-modern exegetes never curtail the right of husbands to engage in corporal punishment or question the right of husbands to serve as spousal disciplinarians. Such a viewpoint firstly condones domestic violence against women and secondly makes it nearly impossible to address the issue (Chaudhry, 2014).

**Domestic violence and pregnancy.** Protecting pregnant women is an important family value in Azerbaijan. The core of this worldview is a direct result of progressive cultural and Islamic values. For example, the emphasis on the importance of childbearing in the Qur'an (2: 233) and hadiths has created a culture that gives importance to procreation and makes childbearing a spiritual experience. Moreover, these sources draw attention to the burden (*dhat haml*) of pregnancy, mandating that pregnant women be especially cared for (Qur'an, 22:2, 65: 4–6).



In general, pregnancy can put a stop to domestic violence, or at least make it visible. For example, the violent partner may stop acting violently in order not to harm the fetus. Also, access to clinical care for pregnant women (i.e., effective family planning methods, contraception facilities, etc.) reduces the risk of domestic violence for pregnant women because the signs of violence can easily be detected during medical examinations (Campbell, Oliver, & Bullock, 1993; Ergönen et al., 2009; Topbas, Ünsal, Çan, Bacak, & Özgün, 2008).

However, pregnancy alone is not a reliable measure for protecting women against domestic violence (Bacchus, Mezey, Bewley, & Haworth, 2004). Indeed, there might also be a strong correlation between pregnancy, especially an unwanted one, and sexual violence (Heise, Ellsberg, & Gottemoeller, 1999). Therefore, women with unwanted pregnancies are also at an increased risk of violence compared to women with intentional pregnancies. Pregnant women, especially those with less education, lower income, and more children who have been married longer, are more vulnerable to domestic violence. For example, they can be excluded from family decisions, less satisfied with their sex life, and more likely to have unplanned pregnancies compared to non-abused women (Topbas et al., 2008). Also, regardless of certain protective factors such as visiting family doctors during pregnancy, many incidents related to domestic violence against pregnant women may also go unnoticed. Therefore, caregivers should specifically pay attention to women who give birth to babies with low birth weight, who miscarry, and whose infants die or have mental health problems, as they are more likely to have been subjected to violence during pregnancy (Iliopoulou, Kanavidis, & Matsoukis, 2012; Shah & Shah, 2010; Wokoma, Jampala, Bexhell, Guthrie, & Lindow, 2014).

### **Method**

As a qualitative study, this research seeks to understand the meanings associated with domestic violence as experienced by pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan with particular interest in describing and recording women's interpretations of domestic violence using the phenomenological approach. The participants recruited for this study were asked questions in order to discover their experiences with domestic violence, as well as how the Islamic understanding of pregnancy and motherhood prevents violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan. The basic assumptions of this phenomenological study are:

- (1) Knowledge is socially constructed, and truth remains relative and illusive.
- (2) Subjectivity, rather than objectivity, is significant in this study.
- (3) Bias is inherent in all research, regardless of the method used.

- (4) Common everyday knowledge about the experience is epistemologically important.
- (5) The language and meaning of everyday life highlights meanings assigned to objects and social conditions.
- (6) How domestic violence is experienced can mean different things to different women.

From this aforementioned perspective, phenomenological research allows highlighting research participants' diversity and the meanings they attach to domestic violence (Churchill & Wertz, 2015). During the process of data collection and analysis, the following sequences were observed: (a) research questions were formulated, (b) participants were recruited, (c) the phenomenon was contacted intuitively, and (d) the phenomenon as analyzed reflectively.

### Participants

The participants were recruited using snowball sampling (referral sampling) from among their acquaintances. They identified themselves as either practicing Muslims, or at least considered themselves culturally as Muslim. All had been subjected to various forms of domestic violence, either by their husbands or other male members of their families. Three of these women lived with the extended family of their husbands (i.e., mother-in-law, father-in-law). From their testimony, husbands who

Table 1  
*Research Participant Demographics*

Age	Over 40 = 2 30-40 = 3 20-30 = 2
Marital Status	Married = 4 Widowed = 1 Divorced = 2
Pregnancy Status at the Time of Research	Pregnant = 3 Not pregnant = 4
Education	MA = 2 BA = 2 College = 2 High School = 1
Denominational Background	Sunni = 3 Shi'a = 2 No denomination claimed = 2
Geographic Area	Urban = 5 Rural = 2
How Domestic Violence is Experienced	Emotionally = 7 Verbally = 7 Physically = 5 Sexually = 0 Financially = 7 Morally/Spiritually = 7



regularly practice Islam don't appear to be violent toward their wives. However, the women also expressed concern with respect to the misrepresentation of Islamic norms and principles; they feel that these misrepresentations increase the rate of domestic violence, at least in the form of emotional abuse (i.e., humiliation, intimidation, infanticide) and verbal abuse (name-calling, yelling, accusing, blaming) towards pregnant women. In addition to their experiences of violence, they also provided insight into the general picture of domestic violence in Azerbaijan, such as lack of shelters for women who have been subjected to domestic violence and the shame imposed on women with respect to violence.

### **Data Collection**

For the data collection method, I conducted semi-structured, face-to-face, qualitative research interviews with seven women in Azerbaijan in order to allow the participants to fully express their needs and desires. The face-to-face interviews additionally generated more information about the topic of interest. The interviews with each participant were scheduled separately and lasted a maximum of one hour. Before the interview, a natural introduction and rapport were established to make the participants feel more comfortable with the interview process. The participants were invited to respond to these questions:

- (1) What are the reasons for domestic violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan?
- (2) Can you name cultural and religious factors in the Islamic tradition that play an important role in reducing (or increasing) the incidence of abuse towards pregnant women in Azerbaijan?

### **Reflective Analysis of Data**

Data gathered through the interviews were analyzed separately. Qualitative research concepts and validation strategies such as triangulation (Sunni/Shi'a, urban/rural, researcher's perspectives) and a constant comparative analysis were used to analyze the data gathered in the research. During data analysis and after transcribing each interview, I broke down each interview and reviewed them, selecting the common themes specific to the study focus, then drew out commonalities and differences specific to each question. The two themes that emerged across the literature are: (a) *The cultural and religious factors that contribute to domestic violence towards pregnant women in Azerbaijan*, such as marrying young, the gender of the baby, *nasab* (the child's proper lineage), poverty, and alcohol/substance abuse; and (b) *How Islam prevents domestic violence against pregnant women*. These were compared to the results of the collected data. Although the question of validity in absolute terms tends to be unfruitful in phenomenological research because all



research only discloses a partial truth limited by the researcher's procedures and perspective (Churchill & Wertz, 2015), I acknowledge that alternative reflections and perspectives can produce other results. However, what is important in this process is that all alternative viewpoints are valuable because they are embedded in common, everyday experience. Therefore, I am not concerned with correcting discrepancies or inconsistencies in this research, but rather with looking for the meaning in the participants' responses and finding out how they explain the common factors that contribute to domestic violence towards pregnant women. Nevertheless, I also admit that applying the results of this study to the general population is difficult, and the findings from these interviews may only make sense in the context of the participants' responses. Also, analysis of the findings is limited to specific themes and does not include descriptions or analyses of other social, economic, or political factors nor geographical locations (i.e., urban vs. rural). Finally, this study could not have been completed without the support of the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Dr. Khayala Mammadova, the Manager of the Organizational and International Relations Department and Gender Commission.

### **Intuitive Contact with the Phenomenon: Contributing Factors Associated with Domestic Violence towards Pregnant Women in Azerbaijan**

Intuitive contact with the phenomenon of domestic violence as experienced by pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan refers to the first look at the phenomenological description of this problem. This process involves elaborating upon the details of women's experiences by subsequently intuiting the inherent meanings of the research participants' experiences, reading and rereading their responses, and empathetically intuiting reality (Churchill & Wertz, 2015). In this process, understanding the richness of the meanings of the described phenomenon is the important step, as intuitive contact with the phenomenon reveals certain essential meanings. In this study, this contact reveals themes such as marrying young, the gender of the baby, and *nasab* (proper lineage of the child), poverty, substance abuse, and women's understanding of the protective role of Islam. Also, as suggested by themes' detailed analyses, these problems should be understood within the cultural and religious context of Azerbaijani Muslims. The participants' rich and complex context has the potential to increase or decrease violence toward pregnant women.

**Marrying young.** The participants of this study reported that many incidents of domestic violence were towards pregnant women who had married young, an especially common practice in rural areas among the displaced people in Azerbaijan. They indicated that early marriages were not a common practice during the era of Soviet Azerbaijan. One participant mentioned that according to Article 176 of the Criminal Code of the Republic of Azerbaijan "early and forced marriages are currently





illegal in Azerbaijan; [still] some parents marry off their daughters at a young age (the girls are usually 16, 17, or 18).” As these marriages are not allowed by law, many parents use religious marriage contracts (*kabin*) to make these marriages official. Other participant also mentioned the “cultural shift in society, which specifically concerns many parents who marry their daughters at young ages.” One interviewee stated this tendency to be related to “parental concern,” so as to prevent societal shame related to early sexual relations out of wedlock. For example, one woman said, “Some parents are afraid that public and frank discussions of sex, especially on many television programs and movies, incite young single people to engage in sexual activity.” Nevertheless, all participants mentioned that many young girls prefer to study rather than marry young, but they feel trapped among family and societal pressures to establish their family. The participants reported a relationship between those who prefer early marriages with those who misunderstand Islamic marriages. These people can also think that early marriages are more stable. However, the participants agreed that early marriages make women, especially young girls, more vulnerable to domestic violence. For example, early marriages bring a lot of pain to young girls; for example, leaving the family at a young age, the fear of adjusting to a new family, sexual health problems related to early marriage, and giving up one’s ideals in life are among the many painful side effects of marrying young.

**Gender of the baby.** One of the reasons for domestic violence against pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan is that some families prefer boys to girls. One participant stated, “Unfortunately, many men still tend to blame the woman for the sex of the child.” Therefore, even though Islam strongly prohibits abortion with the exception of few occasions (i.e., if the mother’s life or health is in danger, or in cases of rape/disability), some families may force women to go through a sex-selective abortion if they discover that the baby is female. One participant mentioned, “These families may or may not consider this to be a type of violence against women.”

The participants in general expressed being unwilling and uncomfortable when they were forced to have sex-selective abortions. They reported that abortion is used as a legitimate way to stop unwanted pregnancies in Azerbaijan. They also stated that in these cases, the law requires families to request an abortion within the first 28 weeks of a pregnancy. However, they reported still being unsure if this kind of abortion is considered moral in Islam. Therefore, some participants reported “feeling extreme guilt and shame after a forced [by their families] sex-selective abortion.” In general, all participants agreed that the issues of sex-selective abortion, gendercide, abandonment, infanticide, and gender imbalances usually affect women more than men. For example, women who give birth to daughters are usually under family and societal pressure for not having conceived a son. One participant mentioned that she “had severe depression and guilt from being pressured to give birth to a son.” Some

of them reported having to have an abortion because of the threat of divorce and physical/emotional violence. They also stated this issue to be of greater concern for pregnant women because the cultural assumption that only boys can take care of their parents in their old age has already become widespread.

**Nasab: The child's proper lineage.** The participants mentioned one reason for domestic violence towards pregnant women in Azerbaijan to be highly related to the extreme emphasis on a child's proper lineage. They indicated that usually the pregnant woman bears full parental responsibility in raising a child out of wedlock, whereas the father bears no responsibility at all. Because a sexual relationship out of marriage is socially unacceptable, these women and children are discriminated against and subjected to violence both in society as well as the family. Participants also mentioned that the societal pressure on mothers affects their children. For example, one participant stated, "these children are treated as 'sinners' and very rarely get rid of the label of 'illegitimate child'." Many participants also mentioned this societal pressure to result in these children being abandoned in garbage dumpsters or orphanages, either by their unwed mothers or their extended families. One participant mentioned that these women have difficulty marrying later on. As a result, many of these women have to marry foreigners, usually non-Muslims or Muslims from other countries who accept them without judging them for not being a virgin and having a child out of wedlock.

**Other contributing factors.** Other factors participants mentioned that breed domestic violence towards pregnant women are poverty and substance use. One participant reported that the poverty rate in Azerbaijan is higher among women than men. The participants explained this factor through the higher rate of unemployment among pregnant women. They also mentioned that poverty and unemployment often elevate the risk of domestic violence towards women because women usually do not earn enough and can be oppressed by the family for being pregnant in a "difficult time for the family." One reported that although she "did not leave the violent relationship, [she] had felt trapped in the cycle of violence [during her pregnancy]."

In regard to substance use, participants mentioned that although Azerbaijan is a Muslim country, substance abuse, especially alcohol, is a contributing factor in domestic violence towards pregnant women. One woman mentioned that she had been subjected to violence more often when her husband drank alcohol. She said that although he had apologized afterward, he did not stop being violent. This particular woman mentioned being thankful that none of her children had been harmed due to his violent behavior. Participants also mentioned that men use alcohol/drugs more than women, and men who consume alcohol can be more violent than men who usually do not abuse alcohol. All of them agreed that substance abuse contributes to family dysfunction and increased violence towards them when they had been pregnant.



### **Reflective Analysis of the Qualitative Data: Islam as a Protective Factor**

The findings related to factors contributing to domestic violence towards pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan mainly relate to cultural and social factors. As the literature review and participants' responses suggest, many women do not even feel comfortable reporting domestic violence to their caregivers or police officers, even in cases that result in direct harm, injury, harassment, or damage to living beings or property. These caregivers and police forget that shaming women for seeking their well-being and safety over family unity does not end violence because domestic violence is not a single incident but a recurring pattern of coercive behaviors and tactics. Violent men use "coercion, terrorism, degradation, exploitation, and violence" in order "to control and subordinate another in an intimate relationship" (Oregon Domestic Violence Council, 1995, p. 3).

The findings once more suggest that domestic violence is a form of oppression against women because it happens in a social context, which "makes violence against an oppressed group possible and even acceptable" (McCue, 2007, p. 5). For example, some women may refuse to report the abuse to law enforcement offices for many reasons. Maybe they don't file a report because of loyalty to their family; they may dismiss the physical and sexual abuse they suffer or fail to seek any assistance from legal or healthcare institutions (Heise et al., 1999; Topbas et al., 2008). In this respect, social attitudes towards violence as a domestic and private issue foster an understanding that violence towards women is normal and acceptable. Such understandings prevent many pregnant women from taking further action in the face of domestic violence. Furthermore, those who report domestic violence may also withdraw their complaints for different reasons, including thinking that government institutions/courts do not provide enough precautions to prevent domestic violence (Topbas et al., 2008).

Furthermore, the participants' answers elicited a variety of responses on the role of Islam in empowering pregnant Muslim women in Azerbaijan. For example, in addition to cultural factors, a patriarchal understanding of Islam also acts as a risk factor that contributes to domestic violence towards pregnant women in Azerbaijan. In these cases, improper presentations and interpretations of Islamic sources cause Islam to be a hindrance in tackling domestic violence towards pregnant women when taken within a socio-historical and political context. Meanwhile, as Muslim scholars (Barazangi, 2006; Barlas, 2002; Chaudhry, 2014; Wadud, 1999) have suggested, Islam can be used to encourage women to seek support and not accept domestic violence as a religious duty in the form of self-sacrifice for the sake of the family unity. In this regard, Muslim women in Azerbaijan should be encouraged to take into consideration a gender-inclusive interpretation of the Qur'an.

This section provides a critical reflective analysis on the role of Islam in tackling violence against pregnant women in Azerbaijan, particularly in cases of marrying young, sex-selective abortions, and pregnancies due to premarital sex.

**Marrying young.** The government of Azerbaijan criminalizes early marriage, for it affects girls more than boys (Law 256-IVQD of the Criminal Code, 2011). Despite these legal measurements, the rise of early marriages in Azerbaijan is one reason for domestic violence against pregnant women. For example, young girls who have insufficient life experiences, education, financial resources, or social skills might be more vulnerable to domestic violence. In 2009, a survey of 19,711 women under 50 conducted by the Justice Ministry found early marriage (under 18) to be increasing; 29% of respondents reported marrying at the age of 18-19 and 25% between 20 and 24. Only 6% of respondents reported marrying between 25 and 29, and 3% after 30. The number of early marriages among women living in rural areas outnumbers that of women living in urban areas. The poll also raises concerns about the increasing number of girls who are stolen by a man (like eloping) from their family, especially in early marriages. However, the attitudes toward girls being kidnapped this way varied substantially among respondents. Only 11% believe this kidnapping to be considered violence; 89% believe that it occurs by the girl's own initiative, 46% think that it occurs as a result of disagreements with parents, 29% because of financial problems, and 15% due to a girl's innocence.

These statistics and interview results suggest that girls marrying young and underage is a growing social problem that alarms many progressive people in Azerbaijan. However, a clear examination of the cultural and religious practices also suggests that this is a cultural practice not specific to Muslims but also to non-Muslims in Azerbaijan and other parts of the world. Therefore, this kind of practice should be considered as cultural violence against women rather than religious.

The results of the interviews suggest that despite the controversial aspects of approaches to the Islamic faith, Islam can still be used as a protective tool to prevent this type of violence towards women in Azerbaijan. For example, the practice of Prophet Muhammad disregards the possibility of marriage without having seen or established a loving relationship with a future partner (Abugideiri, 2012; Barlas, 2002; Hassan, 1990; Rahman, 1990; Shaikh, 1997; Wadud, 1999). Without doubt, patriarchal culture diminishes the role of girls and women in choosing their partners. Male control over women, before and after marriage, is the troublesome reality that Muslim women face in Azerbaijan. By controlling women in every aspect of life, including their bodies and sexuality, men want to achieve a social order that serves their own self-interest (Ali, 2006; Bakhtiar, 2001; Chaudhry, 2014; Dialmy, 2010). In addition, marrying young reinforces the *milk* concept of marriage in Islamic legal ruling, which is "a relationship of ownership or control" that "is predicated on an analogy to slavery at a fundamental level..." (Ali, 2006, p. xxv). Furthermore, some men in Azerbaijan may prefer marrying young because they are extremely concerned about the woman's virginity. Men prefer to marry underage girls whom they believe can pass the virginity test that is used to control women.



Although the Caucasus Muslim Board attempted to address this problem by issuing a *fatwa* (religious verdict) asserting 18 as the youngest age for marriage, it still did not address the misuse of religious marriage contracts (Karat, 2011) or this “virginity test.” My position is that fundamental Islamic sources (i.e., Qur’an) can be empowering in overcoming early marriages. For example, Islam cautions the guardians of girls and women against the misuse of power. Upon the complaint by a woman named Khansa’ bint Khidham al-Ansariyya, the Prophet invalidated her marriage with a man because her father had given her in marriage without consulting her (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book 62, No. 70). In another tradition, the Prophet encouraged parents to consult with their daughters (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book 62, No. 67), as silence cannot always be a sign of consent. Therefore, based on the emphasis of the principle of mutual consent in the Qur’an and prophetic tradition, a majority of Muslim jurists consider a marriage without the bride’s consent invalid. All these Islamic statements confirm the state policy in Azerbaijan that explicitly states a woman should enter into marriage voluntarily and not be forced into marriage (Karat, 2011). Furthermore, the Qur’an and narrations of Prophet Muhammad admonish Muslims to practice *taqwa* (awareness of God and piety), love, and compassion as a form of *ibadah* (worship of God). Marriage is the only legitimate means of emotional and sexual fulfillment, of legitimate procreation, and of inter-family alliance and group solidarity. In an ideal marriage, the wife takes care of herself in order to be attractive to her husband, and the husband should also make himself attractive to his wife.

Finally, although few narrations in the Islamic tradition can be disempowering by presenting marriage to a virgin as one of the best paths to sexual enjoyment (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book 62, No. 17), generally the qualities of future partners in Islam do not consider virginity as a characteristic of the best women for marriage (Brazangi, 2006; Dialmy, 2010; Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book 62, No. 27). This argument can further be accentuated by taking into account that A’isha was the only virgin among the Prophet’s wives (Sahih Bukhari, Vol. 7, Book 62, No. 14).

In addition, the virginity test is a tool to control women and make them dependent on their husbands (Ali, 2006). The prophetic tradition, which clearly indicates virginity to be an unimportant criterion for a successful marriage, can be used to tackle early marriages in Azerbaijan. Also, the general population needs to be educated in regard to other social and moral problems associated with the habit of marrying off young girls and to “accept female premarital sexuality for the sake of reality and sometimes in the name of human rights” (Dialmy, 2010, p. 164).

**Sex-selective abortion.** The findings suggest that in Azerbaijan, women who do not have sons are still stigmatized and criticized for being unable to conceive and bear a son for their husbands. Due to this cultural pressure on women, many women choose sex-selective abortions until they conceive boys. A report by the Health

Ministry suggests that the number of abortions have increased since Azerbaijan gained its independence. For example, abortion is the result in 75% of pregnancies for women between the ages of 35-44, 58% of pregnancies for women between the ages of 25-34, and 13% of pregnancies for women between the ages of 20-24. In addition, abortion rates among unmarried girls between the ages of 15-17 are also increasing. [The report by the State Committee for Family, Women, and Children Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan \(2014\)](#) also indicates that Azerbaijan is a country with the highest rate of abortions among Central Asian countries and Turkey.

The societal and cultural preference for boys over girls has increased domestic violence against pregnant women, divorce, and polygamy in some Muslim families in Azerbaijan. Women who especially go through this form of violence experience multiple health issues. Also, the growing fetus is directly affected by physical, emotional, and sexual violence against women. Such violence increases maternal stress, inadequate nutrition, and poor prenatal care ([Wokoma et al., 2014](#)).

The 2011 Law ([Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, 2011](#)) criminalizing sex-selective abortion aims to bring balance to the natural gender-ratio at birth (about 105 boys for every 100 girls in the South Caucasus including Azerbaijan). However, Islamic principles such as “God alone is the Creator” can also be used to add moral and spiritual value to the law and prevent this kind of violence towards pregnant women. For example, Muslims believe that life is a precious gift from God, but humans are responsible for how they use this gift. They are responsible for preserving their life and the life of others. In addition, the Qur’an clearly declares that killing other humans is against the will of God (6:151, 4:29, 5:32). This important Islamic principle emphasizes that only God can influence the outcome of pregnancy and birth.

In addition, Islam categorically takes away any morality from the practice of sex-selective abortion (Qur’an, 30:4, 50:4, 67:281, 288–289, 17:31). However, some Muslim women may also experience forced pregnancies, even if their health is in danger due to pregnancy-related complications. In these situations, Islam allows abortion based on the principles of the sanctity of human life and the safeguarding of its values by taking the lesser of the two evils ([Athar, 1995](#)). For example, when doctors declare with reasonable certainty that maintaining a pregnancy will endanger the woman’s life ([al-Qaradawi, 1960](#)), abortion is permissible. In this case, the pregnant Muslim woman has a right to choose between two evils, known in Islamic legal terminology as the principle of *al-ahamm wa ‘l-muhimm* (the more important and the less important). The sex of the baby does not belong in the category of *al-ahamm wa ‘l-muhimm* for cases of abortions, but the life and health of the mother does.

**Nasab: The child’s proper lineage.** Another reason for violence against women in Azerbaijan is strongly related to births out of wedlock. Some women in Azerbaijan find themselves in prohibited relationships due to poverty and gender discrimination within





certain segments of society, with a false hope of a prosperous marriage offered by men to these women and girls. These relationships tend to be more abusive, as women and girls do not enjoy the traditional family support system for pursuing their rights. As a result, these women and girls find themselves alone in caring for children out of wedlock and are prone to sexual violence. In addition, women and girls who find themselves trapped in early marriages also have similar problems, as most of these marriages are unregistered. For example, 41% of cases of out-of-wedlock births in Azerbaijan are due to various problems with marriage documents, 33% are because women were under-aged when married, and 26% are for other reasons. However, one official report suggested that around 90% of children in foster care homes have at least one living parent (UNICEF, n. d.). These children and their mothers are more vulnerable to domestic violence in general. These examples show that, like many Muslim countries, Azerbaijan also belongs to the “culture of virginity.” In such a culture, the proper lineage of a child to one’s family is important for ensuring a child’s healthy and virtuous upbringing.

Without doubt, Islam also gives importance to preserving proper lineage (*nasab*), which relates a child to a father and mother through blood relationships; it calls for the proper registration of pregnancy and birth in order for a child to have clear lineage to one’s biological parents (Sachedina, 2009). Indeed, it is for this purpose that the Qur’an (2:228) advises the divorced woman to wait for three monthly periods after her divorce in order to make sure that she is not pregnant before marrying another man in order to ensure true lineage.

However, even in these cases, pregnant Muslim women can find Islamic principles empowering. For example, the Qur’an (2:235) categorically prohibits a man from promising to marry a woman and then abandoning her, which would make her subject to violence. In addition, the principle of *nasab* in Islamic tradition doesn’t take just the honor of women as an important argument in the proper lineage of the child. From an Islamic perspective in general, the right of the child begins over his or her parents before the mother’s pregnancy (Sachedina, 2009). This means that both parents are responsible for the physical, psychological, and spiritual formation of the child. However, putting all the responsibility on women just because they are the visible and most important participants in the procreation and childrearing process is wrong. In summary, regardless of whether the child’s proper lineage is known or not, gender dynamics in many Qur’anic references indicate that Islamic values related to motherhood can be used to prevent violence against pregnant women. This can cultivate a culture that gives importance to procreation and make childbearing a healthy physical, social, and spiritual experience for all pregnant women.

### **Why Do Gender-Inclusive Interpretations Matter in Tackling Domestic Violence against Pregnant Women?**

The Islamic understanding of motherhood and childbearing, as well as its prohibitions of infanticide and alcohol, can be used to prevent domestic violence. However, one also needs

a careful approach to Islamic sources, as an extreme emphasis on patriarchal interpretations exists in key Islamic sources. Although gender-inclusive interpretations also consider the misunderstanding of *nasab* (the proper lineage of the child), virginity, and early marriages, they mainly target pre-modern Muslim exegesis and law on a wife's disobedience as the main risk factor for domestic violence towards women. Therefore, the progressive interpretations of gender-inclusive, egalitarian Islamic sources should be preferred in understanding the Qur'anic treatment of domestic violence. First, gender-inclusive approaches to the Qur'an and other sources of Islam suggest that any attempt to understand the specifics of Qur'anic regulations in isolation from their historical contexts can breed tolerance of domestic violence among Muslims. Such an approach diverts "the attention from poverty, political repression, war, and global power dynamics that are all crucial to Muslim women's lives" (Ali, 2006, p. xviii). Therefore, any interpretation of verses related to the above issues should be treated within the historical context of Qur'anic verses and in consideration of Islam's overall stance towards women. Second, these scholars argue that the Qur'an, as an essential source of Muslim law, calls the disobedient behaviors of both wife and husband *nushuz*. For instance, Amina Wadud (1999), a well-known Muslim activist and feminist scholar, says that the Qur'an does not require a woman to obey her disobedient husband, nor will any such disobedience to her husband isolate them from the community of Islam. Third, the classical understanding of domestic violence ignores many aspects of violence against women. For example, some Muslims narrowly define domestic violence (only an act or behavior that results in bruises and broken bones), excluding other forms of abusive behavior such as verbal abuse (name-calling, insults), psychological abuse (threats, intimidation, humiliation, isolation, stalking, and so forth), sexual abuse (forced sexual acts, forced pornography viewing, withholding sex), financial abuse (being deprived access to money), and spiritual abuse (misusing religious teachings to manipulate behavior, interfering with worship; Abugideiri, 2012, p. 311).

Thus, gender-inclusive interpretations of critical Qur'anic terminology (i.e., *nushuz*, *daraba*) are important in overcoming violence towards Muslim women. These interpretations aim to address gender inequality and women's needs in the family and society. They invite Muslim doctors, nurses, social workers, spiritual counselors, religious leaders, and others to provide a critical attitude toward women's experiences of domestic violence. They highlight the consequences and dangers associated with the apologetic attitude of some Muslim healthcare professionals, including spiritual caregivers, counselors, and leaders, who attempt to defend authoritarian classical interpretations rather than focus on what women experience. Furthermore, gender-inclusive readings of religious/spiritual sources unfold a set of sexist, racist, ageist, classist, and heterosexist beliefs and harmful dynamics that may be responsible for the distress and so-called pathology of women (Neuger, 2001).





## Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is descriptive in nature, and its findings cannot be applied to the general population due to the limited number of participants. This study acknowledges that the problem of domestic violence perpetrated on pregnant women in Azerbaijani society needs to be addressed broadly in order to have a clear, wide, and detailed understanding of the religious/spiritual/moral and social risks and protective factors that contribute to domestic violence towards pregnant women in Azerbaijan. The review of the available literature suggests that domestic violence towards pregnant women is significantly reduced during pregnancy in Azerbaijan. However, the reflective analysis of the phenomenon also suggests that violence can also increase during pregnancy. This may relate to religious, cultural, and economic factors that play a significant role in reducing or increasing the incidence of abuse against pregnant women.

Although the Azerbaijani government recently adopted several measures to tackle violence towards women, the application of progressive Islamic teachings can be used more actively to enhance the moral and cultural meaning of these measures. Such applications of Islamic teachings can also enhance the effectiveness of other services, such as spiritual care and counseling for these women. For example, the readers of this journal might consider the impact of various interpretations of Islamic sources and whether these interpretations empower or disempower pregnant Muslim women's spiritual care and counseling. They may also consider using gender-inclusive interpretations to give new voice and power to women. Furthermore, the major themes associated with the research participants' meanings in this study might create new awareness on the importance of addressing cultural and religious issues over domestic violence towards pregnant women. This can enable one to seek new methods for projecting fresh possibilities of implementing and increasing applied spiritual care and counseling for the support of Muslim women. Finally, one might advocate for creating more community-free resources for women, such as government-sponsored programs for victims of domestic violence (shelters; social, psychological, and medical centers), specifically in rural areas where women subjected to domestic violence have insufficient access to these programs.

Thus, key knowledge gaps exist that need to be addressed. These include improving the knowledge base on the risk of domestic violence with pregnancy, the consequences of domestic violence towards Muslim women in Azerbaijan, and how to tackle the cultural and religious factors that breed violence towards women. Considering the use of gender-inclusive interpretations from fundamental Islamic sources such as the Qur'an and hadiths is also important for overcoming violence towards pregnant women.

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Research Article

# A Qualitative Research on University Students' Religious Approaches during the Grieving Process

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## Abstract

The main objective of this research is to examine university students' grieving process after the death of a relative in the context of their religious approaches. The working group of the study is composed of 15 participants who were determined from the Education, Science-Literature and Theology Faculties of Muş Alparslan University using the criterion sampling method. The study has a phenomenological design. A semi-structured interview form has been used as the data collection tool. Data obtained from the interviews have been subjected to content analysis. Accordingly, students' emotions and behaviors are first concluded to change as a result of their closeness to the relative lost; in the case of losing a closer relative, such as a mother, father, or sibling, negative feelings like anger and rebellion are more dominant. Secondly, although students believe in God, life after death, and heaven, they have been determined to need spiritual support when adapting to loss and rearranging their life. In the study's results, the necessity for developing and implementing spiritual care and counseling is discussed.

## Keywords

Loss • Loss of a loved one • Grief • Mourning • Religious coping • Spiritual care

## Üniversite Öğrencilerinin Yas Sürecindeki Dini Yaklaşımları Üzerine Nitel Bir Çalışma

### Öz

Bu araştırmanın temel amacı üniversite öğrencilerinin yakınlarının ölümleri sonrasında yaşadıkları yas sürecini dini yaklaşımları bağlamında incelemektir. Araştırmanın çalışma grubunu Muş Alparslan Üniversitesindeki üç farklı fakülteden (Eğitim, Fen-Edebiyat ve İlahiyat) ölçüt örnekleme yoluyla belirlenen 15 katılımcı oluşturmaktadır. Çalışma fenomenoloji desenindedir. Veri toplama aracı olarak yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme formu kullanılmıştır. Araştırma sonunda elde edilen veriler içerik analizine tabi tutulmuştur. Buna göre ilk olarak, öğrencilerin kayıplarının yakınlığına göre duygu ve davranışlarının değiştiği, özellikle de anne-baba-kardeş gibi daha yakın kayıplarda isyan ve öfke gibi olumsuz duyguların baskın olduğu sonucuna varılmıştır. İkinci olarak ise araştırmaya katılan öğrenciler Allah'a inanç, ölüm ve ötesine inanç, cennete inanç gibi temel inançlara sahip olmakla birlikte, kayba uyum ve yaşamı yeniden düzenlemekte manevi desteğe ihtiyaç duydukları tespit edilmiştir. Bu çalışma neticesinde öğrencilerin yas süreçlerine yönelik "manevi bakım/danışmanlık" geliştirilmesi ve uygulanmasının gerekliliği tartışılmıştır.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Kayıp • Sevilen birinin kaybı • Yas • Matem • Dini başa çıkma • Manevi bakım

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In a broad sense, grieving describes the deeply distressing period experienced after a loss. It is important to evaluate what the concept of loss contains before examining the grieving process. In literature, loss includes losing anything that seems important and meaningful to an individual. In other words loss not only indicates the absence of a loved one, but also covers many circumstances like the loss of a business, property, materials, or status and loss of relationships like divorce or separation (Worden, 2009). In order for one to continue life in good health, one must accept, experience, and complete the mourning period. The individual in mourning will learn to live life by accepting loss as a part of life (Worden, 2009, 2001). Most people find it difficult to return to their daily routines after the death of a close relative and may not want to go to work to meet simple needs like eating and sleeping. Grievers should rearrange their relationship with the deceased by organizing emotional thought behaviors during the upset and adjusting to the loss. The griever should continue living by accepting the changed position of the lost in one's life.

Many studies have examined the difficult process from the moment of loss to adaptation and the phases experienced during this. The most important of these studies belongs to Kübler-Ross (1997/1969). In her book *Death and Dying*, Kübler-Ross researched her five-stage model related to death. According to her research, the five basic stages of the grieving process are: (a) Denial: It is faced when the negative news is received. It is when loss is not accepted and reactions like “there must be a mistake, this cannot happen to me” are observed. This first phase, when it is important for the individual to save time adapting, is a protective response the organism demonstrates in order to adjust to the traumatic situation. (b) Anger: After facing the reality of loss, this stage is where reasons for the loss are wondered about and questioned; the individual feels anger towards the self and possibly feels responsible. (c) Bargaining: This stage is where the individual desperately hopes for a miracle development, hoping to change the sad truth being faced. (d) Depression: This period is when one accepts being helpless in the face of the negative situation; the pain is really experienced. (e) Acceptance: With the acceptance of truth, this stage is when one questions what should be done, and life is reorganized. These phases are hierarchical and follow each other, but sometimes with the passing of time features like deep sadness, crying, and anger can suddenly return (Kübler-Ross, 1997/1969). Although individual reactions may differ in these phases (i.e., one griever may cry while another seeks solitude), common physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral reactions are observed in individuals during grieving (Parkes, 1998, pp. 856–859). The following reactions may appear after the death of a relative:

**Physical reactions.** These are reactions such as emptiness in the stomach, dry mouth, weakness, crying, and a feeling of drowning (Toth, Stockton, & Browne, 2000).

**Cognitive reactions.** These include shock, refusing to believe the relative died, not focusing on a subject or work, numbness, difficulty making decisions, and excessive preoccupation with the lost one (Worden, 2009).

**Emotional reactions.** Confusion, sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, helplessness, exhaustion, numbness, relief (especially when the deceased had suffered greatly), hallucinations, loneliness, and longing (Balk, 2011) are the emotional signs related with mourning. Because feeling angry toward the deceased for having passed away may be disturbing, anger can be diverted toward one's environment (Worden, 2009). Another destructive feeling that can be observed in individuals who've lost a relative is guilt. This feeling is particularly common in people who think they were not sufficiently interested in the deceased or hadn't fulfilled their responsibilities. Likewise, the relatives of those who died from a long, exhausting, and severe illness may blame themselves for feeling relieved when the person dies (Worden, 2009).

**Behavioral reactions.** These are generally observed as sleeping disorders, refraining from social environments, excessive mobility, continuously visiting places that remind one of the deceased, carrying the deceased's belongings, unable to continue an organized event, or acting irrationally (Balk, 2011; Corr, 1999). In some studies undertaken on the grieving process in university students, decreases in academic success and abstention from social activities are seen (Fajgenbaum, 2007, p. 101; Hardison, Neimeyer, & Lichstein, 2005; Neimeyer, Laurie, Mehta, Hardison, & Currier, 2008, p. 37).

### **Religious Beliefs and Factors Affecting Adaptation to Loss in the Grieving Period**

Losing a close relative is an inevitable phenomenon, and the sadness that follows loss changes a person. Humankind tends to constantly redefine life and reorganize the world in one's mind (Wadsworth, 2015, pp. 21–32). Traumatic events in particular cause people to redefine their lives. Many studies have examined the factors effective on leaving sorrow behind after a death to reorganize one's life. Some important factors have been determined to influence the grieving process for coping with death. These factors are the degree of closeness to the deceased, the nature of the relationship, the way the deceased passed, whether or not one receives social support, past losses, and how one copes using beliefs and values (Worden, 2009, 2001).

The need to find meaning in events is richly met with religious beliefs. Researchers have expressed the importance that having an understanding of mourning at the beginning of the grieving period has as a factor positively affecting the process (Balk, 2008; Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). Again, some studies have found the factor of religious belief to be helpful during mourning (Frantz, Trolley, & Johil, 1996). Balk's (2010) study on students arrived at the finding that religious answers can be useful for the need to find meaning (Balk, 2010).



In general, both religious believers' beliefs after death and participation in religious rituals help explain death during the grieving process, and a meaningful relationship was found between the ability to explain death and having low levels of depression (Matthews & Marwit, 2004).

Religion can contribute positively to the griever by providing death with meaning. However, some studies have shown that religious belief has also been used to make negative statements. Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000), examining the forms for finding religious meaning, defined the positive and negative effects of faith on people. In his study, he developed a "positive religious coping" and a "negative religious coping" model by evaluating peoples' religious explanations of traumatic events. If a person shows religious behavior toward a sad experienced event as "I pray to escape the problem," then belief can help overcome the stress caused by negative events. If the explanation contains negative meanings, such as "I doubt God loves me," this kind of religious faith leads to more sadness and stress (Pargament, 2000).

Ayten's (2012) study on religion in the context of Islam stated that the understanding of a vengeful God negatively affects mental health, while understanding God as merciful and evaluating events as based on God's will and love can contribute positively to mental health (Ayten, 2012, pp. 70–81). In the Islamic literature, many concepts exist for positive coping, such as patience, gratitude, resignation, seeking refuge in God, and not abandoning hope in God. Religious references that can be applied during grieving can help find meaning by cognitively presenting a cause-and-effect relationship. In this way, the mourner can find emotional relief. Here are some verses that can help one in the phases of finding meaning in death, coping, and acceptance: "Muhammad was no more than a messenger, like the messengers before him. Should he die or be killed, would you turn back on your heels?" (Qur'an 3:144). In this passage, one is reminded that the Prophet is also mortal.

You will surely be tested in your possessions and in yourselves. And you will surely hear much abuse from those who were given the Scripture before you and from those who associate others with Allah. But if you are patient and fear Allah - indeed, that is of the matters [worthy] of determination. (Qur'an 3:186)

Being a Muslim does not prevent one's suffering. However, Islam is the way of welcoming suffering, cognitively guiding one in organizing the mind.

The religion of Islam has many explanations about life and death. Muslims believe that death is only for the body; the spirit is eternal, and the purpose for creating mankind is to recognize and try to understand God during the span of life one is granted. According to Islam, people in this world are tried with many positive and negative events in order to reach spiritual maturity. The idea of trial helps to give meaning to



events. El-İsfahani, in his masterpiece *Müfredat* (translated by Güneş & Yolcu, 2012, p. 778), explained this trial as "...throwing gold into the fire to separate the pure from the corrupt." Here, the metaphor of fire can be used to extract the beauties inside a human, and one is tested by being faced with pain through maturity. Some of the many verses regarding the tests of man are as follows: "...We saved you from retaliation and tried you with a (severe) trial" (Qur'an 20:40). "Every soul will taste death. And we test you with evil and with good as a trial; and to us you will be returned" (Qur'an 21:35).

As seen in these verses, death according to Islamic sources is not final; the relatives of the deceased are tested while the deceased is sent to the afterlife. Within the scope of verses, the phrases generally used in the tradition of Muslim populations after one has died also involve this understanding. They are talked about with positive phrases such as "passed over to the afterlife," "connected with the eternal life," "walked to God," "went to kingdom-come," "rest in heaven," "it is the will of God," and "God have mercy on them." The deceased is not actually the one who died, nor has the deceased diminished; one is sent to eternity with the hope of reaching the afterlife. The pain felt after one has died is caused by the loss of the relationship; one can no longer do what they had been done before together. One can no longer spend time with the deceased. In order to cope with death, one can be provided with the coping characteristics of religious belief through appropriate guidance.

Some studies have indicated the positive effect of religion on coping with death to exist through the meaning it provides. One research on students indicated that loss may positively contribute to students' personality development and that the mourning period can become positive (Gilliges & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, 2004). For this, having a student be provided with proper guidance is important (Fajgenbaum, 2007). Again, some research among university students has found the opposite: Students were found to have cognitive issues. Among them were observed confusion about God's characteristics, whether they are good, bad, or cruel, and being afraid to share this thought (Burke & Neimeyer, 2014). On this point, the need can be discussed for the fields of secular and religious counseling to regulate the complex reactions and emotions in the grieving process.

### **Spiritual Counseling/Care and Coping with the Grieving Period**

The objectives of counseling (depending on the principles and approaches of the institution) include support for crises intervention and management; decision making; symptom alleviation; insight and empowerment; remediation; self-actualization; personality exchange; exploration of meaning and transcendental experience; systematic, institutional, or social change; introspection; cognitive change; full functioning; personal development; perspective development; and intentionality (Ok, 2014). Spiritual counseling has three main dimensions: healing, support, and guidance (Koç, 2012).





Religious counseling has emerged to be a form of psychological counseling shaped by counselor's affinity for the broadest values and meanings that consider religious/spiritual issues seriously (Ok, 2014). Spiritual counselors use religious motifs in reference to the sacred in addition to the psychological methods of their studied field (Koç, 2012, p. 204). The realization of psychological healing depends on the therapist's ability to understand the worldview. In this interaction, an empathic communication between the therapist and counselee helps the counselee give meaning to the events being faced (Özdoğan, 2006).

Spiritual care already involves guidance and seems to indicate a less individual and more humanistic structure in this assistive relationship; this is more comprehensive than guidance. The final objective of counseling and care services is to have the individual fully exercise their humanity (Ok, 2014). Although the theoretical subdivisions of psychology and theology differ from one another, each has the common goal of having the individual achieve emotional balance (Özdoğan, 2005). Spirituality contributes to a person's mental health, to responding to personal quests, and to making sense of life (Hökelekli, 2015). Psychological sources and methods have gradually been used in the field of spiritual counseling and guidance (Ekşi, Kaya, & Çiftçi, 2016).

Grief counseling for students, being well researched, is an area of service that has many examples in the world. Balk (2010) determined that students need counselors to talk about and explore negative thoughts; 43.6% of students who had lost a relative were determined to state the helpfulness of talking about the loss, while 42.8% defined this as a little helpful. A study suggesting that spiritual crises can provide positive development has drawn attention to how experiencing loss at a young age can and should be part of one's personality and maturation process (Lord & Gramling, 2012). Grief counseling is not a new field in Turkey; studies exist on how to provide grief counseling to students (Genç & Aydın, 2015, Gizir, 2006, Şenelmiş, 2006; Zara, 2011).

Studies on spiritual grief counseling have tried to expose the need for grief counseling using spiritual values (Kara, 2016a; Yaman, 2016). Işık (2016) defended the necessity of spiritual counseling for families in the process of grieving after having lost a baby. Kara (2016b) suggested a grief counseling model for the feeling of loss experienced by families with disabilities. However, studies in this area are still new. Although the first valuable studies have been undertaken with people of Islamic beliefs, they are few and no model has been developed yet regarding how to implement grief counseling.

Following the death of a loved one, spiritual counseling was assessed for individuals with relatives in need of support; religion has also been assessed in terms of its use for coping with the many cognitive, emotional, and behavioral experiences felt during the

mourning period. As seen, both positive and negative aspects of religious behavior during mourning have been found in field research. One important problem is that those grieving can make their lives even worse with their religious beliefs. In line with this information, this study's aim is to describe the religious feelings, thoughts, and behaviors of students who have lost a relative. This description is based upon previous studies on the grieving process, taking into account the thoughts, feelings, and behavioral characteristics of those who have entered the mourning period after the death of a loved one. These features' dimensions have physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to grieving as well as religious cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses. These dimensions are described in the survey. Students were asked the following basic questions in the study:

1. What did you go through after losing your relative? Can you talk about it?
2. Can you share the religious feelings, thoughts, and behaviors you experienced after your loss?
3. How much time has passed since your loss? What do you think about it now?

### **Method**

This part of the study contains descriptions of the study group, data collection tool used in the study, data collection process, and data analysis. This research has been carried out using a phenomenological design, a qualitative research type. Phenomenology focuses on a phenomenon that lacks in-depth or detailed knowledge, even though people have experienced and are aware of it. In phenomenology studies, the data analyzes experiences to reveal deep meaning. This research, which addresses the issue with qualitative data collection techniques, uses the semi-structured interview. Researchers mostly prefer semi-structured interviews because they remove the limits observed in tests based on writing, filling out forms, and answering questions; they help the researcher achieve in-depth information on a specific subject (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016).

### **Study Group**

The study uses criteria sampling, a purposive sampling method, to form the study group. Criterion sampling creates samples of persons, events, objects, or situations with qualities determined in relation to the problem (Büyüköztürk, Çakmak, Akgün, Karadeniz, & Demirel, 2009). Accordingly, the main criteria chosen by the researcher in selecting the study's participants are to have had a loss, to be Muslim, and to have knowledge on major religious matters such as death in Islam and the hereafter. The study has been performed on students from Muş Alparslan University's Education, Science-



Literature, and Theology Faculties; opinions from 15 students among the volunteers determined to meet the criteria are considered appropriate and have been detailed. Thus, this study is based on the opinions of 15 students. More detailed demographic and personal information about the participants is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1  
*Frequencies for Demographic and Personal Information*

<b>Relationship to the deceased person</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>
Mother	2
Father	2
Sibling	1
Other	10
<b>Time of loss</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>
Within the past year	4
A year or more ago	11
<b>Faculty</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>
Theology	6
Science and Literature	4
Education	5
<b>Gender</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>
Female	8
Male	7
<b>Grade</b>	<b><i>f</i></b>
Freshmen	15

### **Data Gathering Tool**

A semi-structured interview form has been used as the data collection tool in the research. Studies on grief counseling in Turkey were examined and opinions taken. Prior to preparing the interview form, I had been providing information on the period of mourning and spiritual counseling for three years in the course classes of Religion Psychology, Educational Psychology, and Social Psychology. In this process, students' religious interpretations, ideas, feelings, and thoughts were discussed. Later on, I was visited and questioned by a student who had lost her father, as well as a few other students who had also suffered losses; as a researcher, I was directed to study in this field in order to meet the requests and questions of students who told me they were having trouble breathing and needed someone to speak with. Taking into consideration the students' thoughts and studies on mourning in the literature, four students were asked the first questions prepared for the interview form. After they answered these questions, the semi-structured interview was formed in the direction of the answers given with simple, understandable language. The interview form has questions about the griever's personal and religious feelings and thoughts. When preparing the interview questions, principles have been taken into account such as being easy to understand and non-directive (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). In order to check the appropriateness, clarity, and applicability of these prepared questions, the study was presented to experts from the fields of psychological counseling and

guidance, two educational sciences.

The following measures have been taken in order to provide the study's validity. (a) Negotiations with qualitative analysis experts were conducted during the research process. (b) Participants were informed that the obtained information would only be used for scientific studies within the framework of the study's objectives. (c) Participants were informed that their identities would remain anonymous. (d) Why the researcher chose this topic and its role in the grieving process were described in detail, and the study was performed in accordance with the research model. (e) Long-term and in-depth data were collected and checked for consistency; the results obtained from the data have been reported in relation to each other and the literature. (f) Attempts have been made to increase the credibility of the research by providing direct quotations from the interviewed students.

Each phase of the research has been explained step by step in order to provide external transferability; participants' characteristics and the environment are also expressed in detail. The obtained results are believed to be transferable to groups or environments with similar characteristics.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher introduced the interview form to students who knew the topic and wanted to participate because it had been mentioned in class. While explaining the purpose of and questions from the study, students who wanted to participate were told they could bring their written answers or send them by e-mail when they wanted. The main reason for granting time while gathering data in such a way is in consideration of the students' willingness to ponder in solitude the answers to sensitive questions about the grieving process they face.

In addition to this, those who wanted to participate in responding to the questions were given a week, as time constraints on such a sensitive situation can cause students difficulty in focusing on the questions.

### **Data Analysis**

First the data obtained from the texts and e-mails were gathered, then descriptive analysis and content analysis were used to qualitatively analyze the data. Descriptive analysis is a technique for summarizing and interpreting the obtained data according to pre-determined themes. Analyses are often used directly in order to reflect the views of the interviewed individuals; the obtained results are interpreted within the context of causal relationships (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). Descriptive analysis was performed under efficacy guidelines: data consolidation, data presentation, conclusion, and validation (Türnüklü & Ünver, 2000). Content analysis attempts to arrive at

concepts and relations that can generally explain the obtained data. Themes that can be overlooked using a descriptive approach can be discovered with this method (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2016). When presenting the data, criteria such as being a striking (different opinion), explanatory (convenient for a theme), diverse, or extreme example were taken into consideration for selecting quotes (Ünver, Bümen, & Başbay, 2010).

Data obtained from the interview forms were first transferred to Microsoft Office and read several times, thus creating the coding for the readings. When creating the themes, the most often mentioned words and their meanings were included, then the codes were gathered to perform descriptive and content analyses for revealing the themes (categories) that form the main sections of the research findings. Some views have been shared directly as quotes while revealing the findings. The students, whose names have not been used due to ethical sensitivities, have been coded as K1, K2, K3, and so on up to K15.

In this encoding process, students' gender and department were not taken into consideration as these were observed to not have a significant effect on their assessments regarding death. Meanwhile in the process of creating the research's themes and sub-themes, the grieving process was assumed to include certain universal feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. For this reason and as explained previously, the themes supported by universal themes have been chosen because of the similarities between the information given in class and students' own thoughts. For example, the sub-theme of reading from the Quran is absent from the themes in the literature as the Christian culture of religious belief has no tradition for reading for the deceased from a holy book on certain days or nights. This sub-theme has been designed for positive themes that indicate coping with loss. In this context, the themes and sub-themes for this research are shown in Table 2.

Table 2  
*The Themes and Sub-Themes Resulting from Data Analysis*

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<b>1 General negative responses in mourning</b>
1.1 Physical (such as crying, feeling exhausted)
1.2 Cognitive (memories constantly emerge, irregularities, inability to focus on/complete works started)
1.3 Emotional (guilt, anger)
1.4 Behavioral (can't wake up, eating disorders; eating too much or too little)
<b>2 Positive reactions in mourning</b>
2.1 Physical (starting to eat and drink again)
2.2 Cognitive (thinking the deceased to be in peace)
2.3 Emotional (fulfilling responsibilities towards the deceased)
2.4 Behavioral (visiting the grave, talking about the deceased)
<b>3 Positive religious reactions experienced during the mourning</b>
3.1 Cognitive (Belief hereafter; believe in the immortality of the soul; belief that the deceased is in heaven)
3.2 Emotional (patience)
3.3 Behavioral (praying, reading Qur'an, doing good deeds for the deceased, giving charity)
<b>4 Negative religious responses in the grieving process</b>

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4.1 Cognitive (Thinking the world to be unjust, thinking of being a sinner)

4.2 Emotional (Anger towards God)

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As shown in Table 2, four themes and their related sub-themes were formed according to the results obtained in the research. In the first theme of general negative responses in mourning, behaviors were determined such as post-loss crying, inability to sustain daily routines, and non-stop thinking. The second main theme has behaviors related to coping with death. Awhile after the first sadness and shock phase, daily life can continue. The third theme, positive religious reactions in the grieving process, is composed of sub-themes such as praying, continuing the charity of the deceased, and undertaking deeds and activities that will acquire merits the deceased one would have wanted. Additionally, the theme of negative religious reactions experienced in the grieving process has negative reactions such as the feeling that something should have been done or that a sin had been committed to deserve this sorrow or feeling of guilt.

## Results

### Post-Loss Reactions

As mentioned in the literature, a traumatic process occurs after loss. The cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses that students experienced in this process have been identified in this study and will be examined as positive and negative reactions in response to students' answers. The severity of mourning and coping states vary according to loss (proximity, how death occurred, etc.; [Worden, 2009, 2001](#)). For this reason, determining negative reactions is important. The participant students' negative reactions during the mourning period such as crying, sleeping disorders, appetite disorders, being unable to engage in anything, and only thinking of the deceased are also supported in a review of the literature. Most students experience these negative reactions, particularly in the days following the loss. Negative reactions must gradually converge over the course of normal mourning, and one must be able to continue daily life activities and learn to live with loss.

Coping with loss means that one who has lost a relative will re-implement behaviors such as sleeping, eating, going to work, talking about the deceased, engaging one's environment, and focusing on problems to be solved ([Park & Halifax, 2011](#); [Worden, 2001](#)). In this study, students who find it less difficult to remember memories with the deceased or talk about the incident and who consider grave visits as a duty to the deceased can be considered to be coping positively with loss. In this context, positive responses such as visiting the grave, remembering the memories without worry, talking about the deceased, thinking peacefully, and commemorating with love were identified in the students' responses. Grief's positive and negative effect frequencies are presented in Table 3.



Table 3  
*Frequencies of the Positive and Negative Effects of Mourning*

Positive	<i>f</i>	Negative	<i>f</i>
Thinking of the deceased at peace	15	Crying	15
Always remembering the deceased	12	Overwhelming thoughts of the deceased	3
Visiting the grave	9	Feeling exhausted	5
Talking about the deceased with love	9	Anger	4
		Sleeping disorder	6
		Unable to finish started tasks	7
		Difficulty breathing	4
		Withdrawn	4
		Appetite disorders	5
		Intense thoughts about death	3
		Inability to focus	7

The frequency distribution of the themes drawn from students' expressions is shown in Table 3. Here the effects of the grieving period are seen separated into positive and negative.

**Positive reactions.** Five students were shown to think of the deceased as being at peace. In particular, coping was concluded to be easier in cases where the deceased was older and sick. One example is: "My grandfather had lung cancer. His condition was getting worse. His pain was over when he died; he was suffering when he was alive" (K11).

The nine students who visit graves think the soul is immortal and the deceased can see them. Chatting at the grave offers relief, even if it is one-sided. This visit provides peace of mind by considering the deceased's duties to have been fulfilled. This may be helpful in coping with death and avoiding the negative effects of the grieving period.

The 13 students who always remember beautiful memories shared their fond memories of the deceased. For example, they mentioned times spent together in the village taking care of animals, talking, or chatting. Grieving is also the process of coping with and accepting loss. From these students' expressions, coping with the loss of secondary relatives like a grandfather or uncle or the loss of those suffering from a long-term illness seems to be easier. Two students in particular explained that their relative had died because they had been sick. When considered in terms of a cognitive approach, they could cope with loss as they were able to find meaning.

**Negative reactions.** Of the three students who defined memories as source of sorrow, one had lost her father two months prior to the study, and his death was sudden and unexpected. This student said, "My father called me but I didn't go. I told him I would come in two weeks" (K8) and mentioned that she had subconsciously

always kept this dialogue alive in her mind. The student felt guilty.

Fifteen participants stated facing with crying. Crying was determined for all students after loss. Students who lost a relative like a grandfather or uncle stated crying finished after the first few weeks, while students who lost a relative like a father or mother said they continue to cry from time to time. Symptoms felt in the initial phase of grieving were stated as sleeping disorders for six students, appetite disorders for five of them, difficulty breathing for four, difficulty focusing for seven, and unable to complete work they've started also for seven. Of the students who had lost a mother or father, four also still faced symptoms such as being unable to finish work they'd started and withdraw into themselves. One student who had lost a mother had stated no longer wanting to see friends just because they would send greetings to the family, especially to mother.

One negative reaction of anger is observed in all students who have lost a mother, father, or sibling. A sample statement related to this situation is: "My brother was young when he died. I thought he was so big. He was 7 years older than me. I had thought he was so big; now I am the age he was when he died. I am 19 years old. My brother should not have died" (K1).

As seen in the findings, positive behaviors are observed when death is accepted and loss coped with. On the other hand, more negative reactions are observed when the death is in the immediate family. A search of the literature supports the relationship between the severity of loss and negative reactions (Worden, 2009, 2001).

### **Religious Reactions after Loss**

The fact that religious belief can be used both positively and negatively in coping with mourning is given in detail in the study's literature section. The severity of mourning is a variable of positive and negative religious coping, and degree of closeness to the deceased is an important factor in this severity (Park & Halifax, 2011; Worden, 2001). In this study, positive and negative reactions have been observed in accordance with the level of closeness to the deceased. Belief in the afterlife gives one hope of reuniting with the deceased. According to the findings from coping and religious-coping studies that have been undertaken (Pargament et al., 2000), explanations originating from religious beliefs toward traumatic, painful events in life support psychological well-being. Positive religious coping has been determined to positively contribute to personal development and maturation (Lord & Gramling, 2012; Pargament et al., 2000; Park, 2005).

On the other hand, experiencing a traumatic event, especially the loss of a close relative, causes negative physical, cognitive, and behavioral reactions. People want to





understand why these sad things happen to them by questioning the reasons for it. As mentioned above, a significant part of theories on meaning and coping involves religious references; this can be positive. But people with faith can also fall into negative thoughts and feelings about the things experienced; they may see God as responsible for the negative events that have happened to them and feel angry towards God. This situation has been evaluated as negative religious coping in the related studies. People who have experienced traumatic events have been revealed able to experience negative religious feelings such as anger towards God (Pargament et al., 2000).

Positive and negative religious coping characteristics have been compiled from the themes and sub-themes obtained from the results of the study's analysis.

Table 4

*Frequencies for the Positive and Negative Effects of Religious Belief on Mourning*

Positive	<i>f</i>	Negative	<i>f</i>
Praying	15	Confusion (rebelling)	2
Giving charity	6	Feeling guilty/sinful	2
Reading the Qur'an	3	Anger	1
Visiting the grave	8		
Belief in the hereafter	15		

**Positive religious reactions.** Students have been found to most often pray after a loss. The prayers include a wish for the deceased to go to heaven and be happy in the afterlife. Three students who can read the Qur'an pray that the soul of the deceased have their good deeds be accepted and sins –if any– be forgiven. Thoughts related to the afterlife are the beliefs that the deceased (having been a good person) will go to heaven, the deceased is watching from heaven, and they'll be reunited in the afterlife.

The students believe their deceased grandparents can see them from the afterlife and think their elders to be at peace, being able to see what the students study and do for work. These depictions reflect the belief that death is not the end but that we should be patient for we will meet in the afterlife. Six students expressed the theme of giving charity in the name of the deceased, even in small amounts. This is accepted as making the deceased more peaceful in the afterlife. Positive memories such as spending time with a grandparent and being given good advice/recommendations also positively contribute to developing a student's personality and are expressed with feelings like love and respect. One student stated having learned from the grandfather how to read the Qur'an and now was reading for him (K7).

The sub-themes here gather around the immortality of the soul and belief in the afterlife. These support students through positive religious coping. Lord and Gramling's study supports this finding, determining 80.6% of students to have used positive religious coping by thinking of the deceased as being in heaven (Lord & Gramling, 2012)

**Negative religious reactions.** Positive and negative ways of finding the religious meaning of events are defined in the literature. In this study, students who had lost a mother, father, or siblings were determined to sometimes make negative religious assessments. These thoughts are shaped around rebellion, anger, and guilt. K12 made the noteworthy expression: "My mother will not be by my side anymore. Sometimes I cry, 'Why me? Why did you take my mother, God?' I wonder, 'Is there not any other kind of test?' I sometimes think that."

Students who make negative religious explanations feel angry at God for taking the mother, father, or sibling so early by asking what good is there for them when the parent is no longer present in their life. Again, another student explained the loss of the father dying saying, "I must have committed a sin." They feel guilty before God. In a similar study, [Burke and Neimeyer \(2014, p. 5\)](#) determined that youngsters felt far removed from religious beliefs after losing a relative. Here is one of the quotes: "After I lost my brother, I was no longer interested in whether or not I was a sinner." In summary, negative religious coping can be said to be a factor that makes coping difficult for students, especially those who have lost an immediate family member.

### The Relationship of Loss with Time

[Kübler-Ross's \(1997/1969\)](#) study, which evaluated the phases of mourning, indicated that shock, anger, and denial were observed during the initial phases, but these phases did not follow any hierarchical order; reactions in these first phases might even repeat for some time after according to the condition of the loss. Negative coping through religious belief can be observed in these phases. Reactions to the death of an immediate family member are more traumatic and the grief more severe. In this study, the sadness of students who've lost an immediate family member is seen to be repeated at certain times in one's life. [Lord and Gramling's](#) study supports the findings of this study and determined the relationship of grief symptoms' severity with negative religious coping. In order to determine in the current study how and when students who'd lost a relative coped with the loss, the students were asked when they'd experienced the loss ([Lord & Gramling, 2012](#)).

Table 5  
*Frequencies for Time since Loss*

Time of loss	F	Type of Loss
Within the past year	4	(1 mother, 1 father, 2 grandfathers)
Over a year ago	11	(1 mother, 1 father, 1 brother, 1 uncle, 3 grandfathers, 3 grandmothers, 1 maternal uncle)

The students were asked when they'd suffered a loss; four were observed to have suffered a loss within the past year. The other 11 had suffered a loss more than a year ago. The participating students who had lost a mother, father, or sibling managed to cope with continuing their lives. Although not as severe as in the first phase when



they'd experienced the loss, sometimes at graduations or weddings they would feel the loss deeply again. One student's remarkable expression is as follows:

I had gone with a friend to learn if we'd been accepted into a university. We had both been accepted. My friend called her mother, full of joy. I said, "See you later, dear," and left. I cried so much that day. I didn't want anyone to console me. I wanted my mom to come tell me, "Don't cry, my daughter." I wanted her to tell me how her little daughter had grown up and been accepted into a university. (K12)

Students stated that life would have been better if their mother, father, or sibling who'd passed were still alive. Even with daily routines, the absence of the immediate family member is constantly felt.

### Discussion

This study examines the emotional thoughts and behaviors of students who have lost a relative, emphasizing that students should be emotionally supported. As previously mentioned, grieving is a process of experiencing many emotional, behavioral, and cognitive processes related to sadness, stress, and adversity that begins as soon as someone learns of the death of a close relative. Grieving is an emotional depression where one loses the desire to look after one's self and perform daily functions. An individual who learns of a relative's death and who experiences normal grieving starts with the reactionary phase of shock, denial, anger, and depression until moving on to the phase of acceptance. According to Kübler-Ross (1997/1969), in order to have a positive life and mental health, one needs to pass through these phases in a normal grieving process and then continue a normal life. In the literature, coping with loss is when one accepts the loss and rearranges life (Kübler-Ross, 1997/1969).

The closeness of the loss, the severity of mourning, how the deceased died, and the spiritual expressions used are important factors that affect coping (Worden, 2009, 2001). Pargament (1997) undertook several studies on how people give meaning to events they face. Religion is effective in providing positive spiritual conditions and in being a source of peace through how it explains traumatic incidents (Ayten, 2012; Ekşi, 2001; Pargament et al., 1994).

On the other hand, negative ways of religious coping were also determined. While evaluating religious coping, Pargament exposed positive and negative styles. A person who has experienced an event and feels the need to pray to God is an example of positive coping. However, one who considers a painful life experience to be punishment from God shows a negative use of religious belief and is an example of negative religious coping (Pargament, 1997). In another study with similar results (Bjorck & Thurman, 2007), the perception that individuals who frequently

face traumatic events have of God gradually becomes negative. In other studies on grieving, a relationship was identified between negative coping and loss, which may be the most traumatic incident in an individual's life. When sadness is severe, answers to questions like "Why is this happening to me?" tend to also be negative (Lord & Gramling, 2012; Park & Halifax, 2011; Worden, 2001).

Students were determined to use both positive and negative religious coping styles. In terms of religion, coping styles related to the loss of a grandfather, uncle, grandmother, or sick relative are also positive. All death is sad, but because death is an expected result of old age and illness, coping with these types of loss takes less time. Positive religious coping is used in the process of coping with these manners of death. These are gathered around positive religious themes such as reuniting in the afterlife, reading the Qur'an for the deceased, performing good deeds in their name, visiting their grave, and praying for them.

Students may use negative religious coping in the case of the death of an immediate family member. Because grieving is particularly more severe in these cases, coping with loss becomes harder. Negative religious explanations are observed in these situations, and expressions like being "angry at God for taking mother so early," and "unable to live life with a father because of my sins" have been determined as negative religious coping. Finding religious meaning has been concluded to be affected by the degree of closeness to the deceased relative. The findings from studies given above on positive and negative coping support this study's findings. Another finding is that positive and negative religious coping can coexist. Students who feel angry at God can also believe they'll be reunited in the afterlife. Anger and hope are felt simultaneously. Another important finding of this study is that losing an immediate family member continues to cause sadness, even with the passage of time. In the literature, Kübler-Ross's (1997/1969) indication that the emotions and thoughts of the griever can return during significant life incidents also supports the findings of this study.

Students have been observed to make religious assessments based on the personality of the deceased rather than on variables such as the student's faculty or age. Although the students have religious knowledge, severe grieving is seen to greatly affect their cognitive processes. On this point, students have been observed to need someone to consult with. Although grief counseling has existed for years in Turkey, studies on spiritual counseling/care are still in their infancy. Attempts to add grief counseling using spiritual meaning to the field are currently underway. In light of these findings, a few points have been determined regarding spiritual counseling that should be taken into account. Spiritual counseling is not about evaluating behaviors or passing judgment in terms of Islamic law. Spiritual counseling is focused on

emotional solutions and aims to understand negative feelings and thoughts to assist in eliminating them. This point is important because, as determined in this study, people with faith can in some cases use their beliefs negatively. While religious belief can explain life events and provide peace, it can also be a source of stress when negative coping is used (Pargament, 2002).

When evaluating religious knowledge from this significant point of view, this knowledge alone may not be sufficient under the roof of spiritual counseling. The psychology of loss also needs to be known. Having knowledge of the many variables and their effects (i.e., the individual stages of grief) is important. The stage and severity of grief also affect religious thought. This area of study, from theory to implementation, needs much research, both on students and other segments of society.

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Book Review

## An Integrative Approach to Spirituality Based on Attachment

Hatun Sevgi-Yalın<sup>1</sup>

“Buddha’s Mom: The Neurobiology of Spiritual Awakening”

Vincent Schroder, Philadelphia, 2017, Elsevier, p. 390

The human soul, or psyche, is a subject upon which many things have been said in an attempt to understand it. Religion and science are considered to be the two main and opposing authorities for its explanation. However, questions about the true nature of the psyche still remain. In the last few decades, research has followed a new path where religion and science have met and become friends rather than opponents. Vincent Schroder’s book, *Buddha’s Mom: The Neurobiology of Spiritual Awakening*, converges science and spirituality by examining Buddha’s psycho-spiritual inheritance through attachment. The book aims to explore the possible picture “before enlightenment” in a way that is both scientifically solid and spiritually sound.

Schroder completed his doctorate in the field of clinical psychology and has two master’s degrees, one in clinical psychology and another in counseling. He received his degree in America and has spent most of his career in Hawaii and Florida, with some studies conducted in Thailand. Currently, he works as a psychologist and adjunct professor.

The book consists of nine chapters. Chapter 1 aims to uncover all the distinguishable early-life influences of Siddhartha Gautama, who later became Buddha. Two

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attachments are focused upon: one is the maternal/biological attachment, mainly studied by John Bowlby, and the other is Buddhism's major tenet where Buddha declares attachment as the source of human suffering. In the next three chapters, the concept of attachment is viewed through different lenses, such as Ken Wilber's integrative model and main terms. Chapter 5 is about Buddha's stepmother, Prajapati, who played significant role in Buddha's early life and potential for his enlightenment. Through her, the feminine principle is reviewed and deeply examined for its importance in the human psyche and sentience. In the following two chapters, the wounds of attachment and their manifestations are explained. Through to the end of the book, consistencies among spiritual heritages, evolution, and neuroscience are shown (based on biotensegrity, polyvagal theory, and somatic psychotherapies) through certain schools of Buddhism.

In the 1960s, [John Bowlby \(2005\)](#) performed groundbreaking research on attachment, demonstrating how early life experiences (especially the mother-baby relationship) have tremendous implications on development over one's life span and enormous power in shaping the personality (self/ego/mind). He scientifically studied how once a baby establishes a certain attachment style with a caregiver, the pattern repeatedly follows into adulthood. Schroder gives wide space to attachment theory, examining Buddha's life from Bowlby's perspective. In the case of Siddhartha Gautama, he was born in wealth and treated with an abundance of love. He had strong love-based relations with his extended family, including his friends and wife. But at some point in his life, he decided to leave all that behind, struggling to free himself from both materialistic and emotional attachments. He looked for meaning, a spiritual truth, and finally reached the realization that being attached, clingy, and longing causes human suffering.

How distinct from the attachment discovered by Bowlby is that identified by Buddha; how much do they overlap? On this point, the author invites readers to look at these two attachments through specific lenses, such as [Ken Wilber's \(2000\)](#) integral model and certain key concepts that move one toward a marriage of two attachments (pp. 46, 74, 75). Even though these two attachments remained separate throughout the years, Schroder discusses this distinction through the concepts of "relative attachment" (p. 64) and "relative love" (p. 69), merging them in a way where they both have their place in human functioning.

After reaching an integrated approach to attachment, the author focuses on Siddhartha's biography, especially on his relationship with his stepmother, in order to show this bridge. Embodying both sides of attachment, his stepmother both protected and released him. Through her, Schroder puts emphasis on the feminine principle (pp. 34, 59). He discusses how a lack of integration of the feminine principle leads to oppression and misalignments, and how this principle turns out to be the key for

humans to reach their ultimate. Additionally, what Siddhartha found after leaving home and six years of searching was also integration, a Middle Way defined as neither over-attachment nor over-detachment.

From this point, the author turns to the biological territory and points out the importance of early life attachment on one's spiritual journey. As the body of attachment research shows, maternal attachment shapes all kinds of relations, including body, emotion, feeling, self, others, work, values, and spirituality. Also, the wounds of attachment damage emotional growth and directly contribute to suffering in the form of self-blame (p. 213), de-realization (p. 214), feeling insufficient (p. 216), self-harm (p. 217), being a problem child (p. 219), and meaninglessness (p. 221). Therefore, the healthier one's attachments, the greater the potential Buddhism has to light the way.

Toward the end of the book, Schroder points out how integral the perspective to attachment is manifested, both in certain Buddhist schools and in the research findings of neuroscience, evolution, and clinical psychology. Practices in Vajrayana and Tantric Buddhism combine the body and spirit in a way that aim for nonattachment by repurposing every manner of attachment. [Jaak Panksepp's \(2004\)](#) work in the field of affective neuroscience and studies in biotensegrity (p. 331), polyvagal theory (p. 337), and somatic therapies (p. 339) show the fuel behind the spiritual journey, also indicating how the depth of being human is somatic. As the evidence shows, the potential for spiritual growth and realization comes through attachment. One liberates from attachment through attachment.

In conclusion, Buddha's Mom provides a model in which science and spirituality together offer an integrative approach to human functioning. The author shows this integration with attachment through Buddha's biography, Buddhist teachings, and scientific findings in neuroscience, evolution, and clinical psychology. Through many important and inter-related ideas and research findings from different fields, "two attachments" reach an integrative perspective. This integrative lens also allows one to see how many of history's respectable teachers, poets, philosophers, and prophets share common ground with scientific findings and Buddhist teachings. Schroder offers a novel model that provides a framework and inspiration for future studies and applications on spirituality and psychology/psychotherapy integration. As such, this work can contribute to the theoretical foundation needed for developing spiritual-oriented interventions in the field of psychotherapy. By pointing out the importance of early attachment experiences on spirituality, paradoxes, and pity teachings, this work can also help construct the contents of such interventions. The book is so rich in terms of concepts and theories. However, a more organized presentation of this voluminous knowledge will help readers follow and comprehend better. This need for presentation is considerably expected in future editions of the book or in future studies.



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