Reviewer’s report

Title: Factors promoting Iranian older adults’ spirituality: A qualitative content analysis

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Reviewer: Gørill Haugan

Reviewer’s report:

The topic (old individuals' perception of spirituality in Iran) of this manuscript is actual, interesting and important to health professions.

Thus, I want to encourage you to continue your work on this manuscript.

I have some comments and suggestions for you in order to improve your paper.

A great number of old studies (literature) are used in this manuscript. Though I understand that some references are central, in spite of old age, I encourage you to look at the use of literature. Annually, a huge number of studies are published in the field of spirituality. Hence, I guess that you will be able to include more recent literature.

The purpose of this study "was to explore factors promoting Iranian older adults' perception of spirituality".

I have to admit that I have struggled in order to understand this aim: to explore factors promoting something is understandable, but factors promoting individuals' PERCEPTION of spirituality is difficult to grasp. Please, clarify how you understand to promote a PERCEPTION of something?

Might this be rephased so that the aim is very clear and precise to the international reader?

INTRODUCTION SECTION:

At page 6, line 10, the authors state that "Spirituality evolves during lifetime and is essentially a psychological and social phenomenon [11]."

This needs some explanation; how do you define spirituality?

Most commonly, health theories and questionnaires measuring quality of life/well-being, claim that humans includes four dimensions; the physical (body), psychological (emotional), social and spiritual (spiritual/existential) dimensions. In accordance to this common understanding, you need to clarify how you understand spirituality in this study, and explain what you mean by stating that the spiritual dimensions belongs to the psychological and social dimension.
Page 6, line 51: "Spirituality can be conceptualized as a characterological aspect of personality or a distinct construct [18]."

Please, explain and show in more details what this statement implicates.

Page 6, line 56: "Criteria for spirituality is an indication of the high sensitivity of this concept regarding the cultural features of society and for this reason there are differences on how it's viewed among individuals [20]. I am sorry, but I am not able to understand what point you intend to highlight by this sentence. Please, explain and simplify.

* what do you mean by "criteria for spirituality"?

* what is an individual's sensitivity of a CONCEPT? Do you mean older individuals' awareness of their spiritual experiences? And thus a phenomenon, and not a CONCEPT?

At page 7, line 9-10, the authors refer to "this period of age". Please, specify which period of age you have in mind.

At page 7, line 32-24, the authors state that "With spiritual help to ill elderly people, their threshold of tolerance for illness and problems will surpass their physical problems and they will find meaning in their lives [26]." This is an assertion that needs some explanation. Do you mean that any kind of "spiritual help" always will be followed by perceived meaning in life among all ill older individuals? If so, you need to show the evidence and theoretical foundation for this declaration. I suggest that you rephrase this statement to be more precise and specific.

I miss that the aim of the study is clearly and precisely stated as part of the main text. The aim is described as part of the Abstract, but not in the main text. Preferably, the aim should be presented before the Methods section.

RESULTS SECTION.

In general, I find the inclusion of empirical data limited.

I would have preferred that you present more data and clearly show how your interpretations and reflections are based on the empirical data in this study.

In this version of the manuscript, transparency and intersubjectivity are scarce. As a consequence, validity is poor.

Page 11, line 28-33: "Coding and categorizing the interviews regarding the factors influenced spirituality pivoted around three main categories of insight in one's belief, spiritual socialization and peace of mind which each one of them had sub categories as shown in table 1."

It seems to me that the coding and categorization of the empirical data have been done by searching for "factors that influenced on" these 22 old individuals' spirituality.
However, as I read the aim of this study, you focus on "factors that promote Iranian older adults' perception of spirituality". I suggest that you consider to express the aim of the study precisely in accordance with what you actually have done during the analysis of the data.

Page 11, line 37-38: what do you mean by the notion "one's belief in spirituality"? I expected that the one's beliefs are part of one's spirituality, or an expression of spirituality - and not belief IN spirituality. This needs some explanation.

Page 11, line 43: ".....by observing these principles they expected to reach peace of mind". Which principle are you referring to?

Page 11, line 58: "...attempt to reach that spiritual goals." Which spiritual goals? Please, be clear and precise throughout the entire manuscript.

Page 11, line 50: "Insights in One's Belief".

An explanation of what you mean by this notion is very welcome. What kinds of insight? Please, provide some examples and clarification.

You are writing about "Beliefs", and later about "faith". How do these differ? What is included in beliefs, and what's included in faith? Or are they identical...?

Page 11-12, line 58-4: "They believed that with time they had reached this point of insight of belief by contemplating about the different events of their own life and this can lead to a high capability in individuals to understand personal and social phenomena".

* which "point of insight" do you have in mind? Please, present the empirical data and show clearly to the international reader what kind of insight you are referring to.

Page 12, line 23: "This insight...." Which?

Page 12, line 30: "...this period..." Which?

Page 12, line 30: "This phenomenon...." Which?

Page 13, line 40-51: I am struggling to understand what the notion "Spiritual socialization" entails. Please, explain and define.

Page 14, line 45-57: "Spirituality means doing good things and avoiding doing bad things. According to them when you do good deeds, help others, benefit your society and you are friendly and kind, you will be regarded as a role model by your family and others. ....the spiritual position of the individual is actually his humane value which relies upon his purity of good intentions and good deeds".
In many cultures and contexts, doing good things, avoiding doing bad things, being friendly and kind etc. are perceived and expected to be common values, independently from spirituality and religiosity. It is about being a good human being. Therefore, this finding is interesting, and it needs to be properly addressed in the discussion section. Does this study conclude that spirituality = to be a good human being?

Or is this about the fact that in Iran, spirituality and religiosity are closely intertwined, so that, in this specific context/culture, spirituality is about doing the good things that God expects people to do?

DISCUSSION SECTION

Page 18, line 30-51: I suggest that you consider to move this paragraph starting with "Nelson-Becker, Nakashima and Canda (2006) have formulated eleven different aspects for spirituality including such areas as spiritual affiliation....." to the introduction section.

At page 18, in the last sentence, the authors refer to previous research mentioning spiritual awareness (cognition), spiritual motivation and spiritual functions. I suggest that you present central studies and established insights concerning spirituality as part of the introduction section. And then use these insights to enlightening your data/findings as part of the discussion section.

I miss that you discuss the validity of this study.

CONCLUSION.

Page 21, line 51: "This study presents in-depth data on the concept of spirituality from older people's viewpoints."

I am not convinced about this. To me, this manuscript does not provide in-depth data on spirituality, nor in-depth insights on spirituality.

Moreover, I find it confusing that you seem to use the notion "concept" of spirituality synonymously to people's experiences of spirituality in their daily life. To my knowledge, a CONCEPT is a theoretical construction. Individuals experience phenomena, not concepts. I suggest that you look carefully at this point throughout the entire manuscript.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

A statement about what new insights this study provide to which research field is very welcome.

Page 22, line 14-17: "Also, by using the results of this research, health researchers design more appropriate tools for measuring spirituality based on older people's perception of the concept of spirituality".
Again, do you really mean the CONCEPT of spirituality? Or the phenomenon? Please, specify and make the paper consistent at this point.

I also suggest that you show how the present findings are important in order to develop more appropriate measurement models of spirituality; what is the main contribution of your study? Why is this study needed and important?

Are the methods appropriate and well described?
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Does the work include the necessary controls?
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

No

Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

Quality of written English
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Not suitable for publication unless extensively edited

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