

THE INTEGRATION OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY INTO SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND EDUCATION

Leola Dyrud Furman, Ph.D., Associate Professor Emeritus
University of North Dakota, Grand Forks ND

Perry W. Benson, MA
University of North Dakota, Grand Forks, ND

Edward R. Canda, Ph.D.
University of Kansas, Lawrence, KS

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to extend special thanks to Dr. Michael Sheridan of Virginia Commonwealth University for her pioneering work in developing surveys on social worker's views about spirituality in social work. She generously permitted us to build on her work in developing our own survey instruments. As we modified her original survey instrument for use in national and international studies, any limitations in design should be attributed to us. We would also like to thank Professor John Hoover of Saint Cloud State University for his expertise and his contributions to our revised survey and questionnaire design.

INTRODUCTION

The present study, conducted in 2008, followed a similar protocol used in the 1997 national study of National Social Work (NASW) members in direct practice regarding religion and spirituality (see the 1997 US Executive Report). Its purpose, then and now, is to better understand the extent to which practicing social workers on a national level incorporate religion and spirituality in their practice and to explore their views of the appropriateness of religion and spirituality in social work practice. The 2008 findings are included in the second edition of *Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice: The Heart of Helping*, by Dr. Edward Canda and Dr. Leola Dyrud Furman.

From its humble beginnings in the settlement houses and religious charitable organizations, social work has been involved with all areas of the human condition, including religion and spirituality. During the twentieth century, however, scientific discourses and practices were transformed into institutionalized disciplines, and the process of secularization privatized the cultural domains occupied by religion and spirituality. As a result, human experience has been dissected and analyzed via empirically-based, non-sectarian theories and practices that have often ignored and/or discounted human subjectivity. Profound changes in the profession have occurred in the 21st century, however. Religiously- and spiritually-sensitive social work practice is no longer just a special interest of some professionals. It has become a necessary component of 21st century practice, given the strong influences that religion and spirituality can have on the construction of both individual and group identity.

In addition to the current national interest, there has also been a global resurgence of professional interest in religion and spirituality. The 2008 US National Survey is also a component of a larger international study that includes research from the UK, Norway, and New Zealand. Cross-national research has allowed social workers to investigate and to compare the attitudes and

practices of practitioners from various parts of the world to determine which aspects of religion and spirituality in social work practice are universal, which religiously-based and spiritually-based practice issues can be applied in a therapeutic way, and how specific practice interventions are used across cultures.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

To clarify definitional issues for respondents, the questionnaire began with operational definitions of what was meant by spirituality and religion. Specifically, *Religion* was defined as “an organized structured set of beliefs and practices shared by a community related to spirituality,” whereas *Spirituality* was defined as “involving the search for meaning, purpose, and morally fulfilling relation with self, other people, the encompassing universe, and ultimate reality, however a person understands it.” It was explained that spirituality can be “expressed through religious forms, but is not limited to them.” Furthermore, the respondents were informed that some questions addressed spirituality in both religious and non-religious forms. When all forms of spirituality were intended, both spirituality and religion were used in the question.

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The survey instrument was available in both paper and on-line formats. The on-line version retained the wording and design layout of the paper version. The questionnaire consisted of 126 items that included demographic, education, and practice information. Items concerning past and current religious or spiritual affiliation and/or involvement were used. As in 1997, the questionnaire contained a scale separating religion from spirituality that assessed practicing social workers' agreement with raising the topic of religion and spirituality for differing client needs. Some items were drawn from Dudley and Helfgott's (1990) study, and Sheridan et al's (1992 & 1994) scales. Also, modified items were used from Bullis' Doctoral dissertation (1993). The instrument also included a new scale that assessed raising the topic of religion and spirituality for client issues related to gender, sexual orientation, older adulthood, political beliefs, religious beliefs, disability, and poverty.

In addition, there were items exploring conflicts between religion and spirituality with the social work mission, code of ethics, and separation of church and state. Respondents were asked to report on the use of and the ethical appropriateness of spiritually based helping interventions. The instrument also contained questions related to childhood and adulthood participation in religious and spiritual services and practices, and respondents' attitudes toward religious and spiritual experiences.

Finally, items regarding forgiveness, referral to clergy, and respondents' definitions of the terms *religion*, *spirituality*, and *faith* were included, as well as two open-ended questions that invited respondents to provide commentary on the topic of religion and spirituality in social work practice and education.

METHODOLOGY

A stratified-random sample of 8,000 practicing social workers was selected from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) membership lists. This survey population was limited to social workers in the following professional practice areas: Aging, Child/Family Welfare, Criminal Justice, Medical/Health Care, Mental Health, Occupational SWK-EAP, School Social Work and Other. These practice areas identified the professional orientation of the service which the NASW member was providing, regardless of place of employment or role in that service.

Table 1. Regional Survey Response Rates

Region	Returned	Total Mailed	Regional Response Rate (%)	Margin of Sampling Error (+/-)	Total Returned (%)
Northeast	355	2000	18	5.2	19.7
South	458	2000	23	4.6	25.4
Midwest	435	2000	22	4.7	24.1
West	543	2000	27	4.2	30.1
Region Unidentified	13	---	---		0.7
Total	1,804	8000	23	2.3	100.0

Based upon the U.S. Census Bureau Regional Divisions, the population was stratified by state into four regions: Northeast, Midwest, South, and West. Two thousand questionnaires were mailed to each area in February 2008. A replacement survey was sent to those who had not returned the survey at the end of April 2008. Of the 8,000 questionnaires mailed, 1,804 were returned, representing a 23% overall response rate (+/- 2.3% at the 95% confidence interval) (See Table 1).

Respondents had two options to complete the survey. The completed paper survey could have been returned by folding the questionnaire in half so that the postage-paid return mailing cover was exposed, and closing it with adhesive or cellophane tape; or respondents could complete the survey online rather than returning it via postal service. Respondents were directed to go to www.spiritualityreligionsurvey.com and click on the survey link on the homepage and then enter their access code (found on the cover letter and the mailed survey instrument) to begin the online survey process.

FINDINGS

Sample Characteristics

The sample was composed of 72.6 percent (n=1,309) women, and 26 percent (n=469) men (see Table 2 below). The data for gender were missing on 1.4 percent (n=26) of the surveys. The average age of the respondents was 58 (standard deviation of 10.7) with a range of twenty-three to eighty-nine. There were forty questionnaires missing data pertaining to age. Most of the 2008 respondents were Caucasian/Euro-American (87.1 percent, n=1,572). The rest of the sample were African American 4.2 percent (n=75), Latino/Hispanic American 3 percent (n=54), Asian American/Pacific Islander 1.5 percent (n=27), Native American (First Nations) 0.3 percent (n=5), mixed heritage/bi-racial 1.3 percent (n=23), and other 1 percent (n=18). Missing data accounted for 1.7 percent (n=30).

The participants were also requested to indicate their current primary religious or spiritual orientation (see Table 3 below). Not surprisingly, by far the largest percentage of the respondents related that they were Christian (56.8 percent). Adherents to various forms of Judaism (20.2 percent) formed the second largest religious category. There is also a wide variety of other religious orientation affiliations, most notably Buddhism, Goddess religion, spiritism or shamanism, traditional First Nations and Native Hawaiian, and Unitarian. In addition, about 14 percent of participants indicated a nonreligious orientation as their primary affiliation.

After selecting a primary affiliation, participants were then asked to indicate if they have only one primary religious or spiritual affiliation, a multiple religious orientation (combinations of at least one religion and any other religious or spiritual orientation), or a multiple non-religious orientation (any combination of atheist, agnostic, existentialist, nonaffiliated Jewish, and none) (see Table 4). Among Christians, 6 percent indicated they have a multiple religious orientation.

Among those with a primary nonreligious spiritual orientation, 1.6 percent indicated that they have a multiple religious orientation, and 6.8 percent have a multiple nonreligious orientation. Overall, 5.9 percent of the sample indicated a multiple religious orientation, and 1.2 percent indicated a multiple nonreligious orientation. As mentioned earlier, in 2008 we asked participants to select one current primary religious or nonreligious spiritual orientation that aligned with their current worldview, and then to indicate if they subscribed to more than one religious or nonreligious spiritual affiliation.

Table 2. 2008 National NASW Survey Sample Characteristics

Demographic Indicator	Category	Percentage (%)	Frequency
Gender	Male	26.0	469
	Female	72.6	1,309
	Not Reported	1.4	26
Race/Ethnicity	African-American	4.2	75
	Asian American/Pacific Islander	1.5	27
	Caucasian/Euro-American	87.1	1,572
	Latino/Hispanic American	3.0	54
	Multi-racial	1.3	23
	Native American/Alaskan	0.3	5
	Other	1.0	18
	Not Reported	1.7	30
Primary Area of Practice	Administration/Government	1.1	19
	Aging	8.4	151
	Child-Family Welfare	6.8	122
	Community Organization	0.7	13
	Criminal Justice	1.4	25
	Higher Education	1.8	33
	Medical Healthcare	10.8	194
	Mental Health	50.3	908
	Occupational SW—EAP	0.8	15
	Pastoral Care	0.1	1
	School SW	5.0	91
	Substance Abuse	1.7	31
	Vulnerable Populations	3.0	55
	Other—Unspecified, Retired	5.4	98
Not Reported	2.7	48	
Primary Work Setting	Private	55.8	1,006
	Public	39.7	716
	Not Reported	4.5	82
Practice Location	Rural	16.0	289
	Suburban	35.3	637
	Urban	43.0	776
	Not Reported	5.7	102
Education Level	BA	0.4	8
	BSW	1.2	21
	MS/MA	1.5	27
	MSW	83.1	1,499
	PHD	9.3	167
	Post-Doc	1.3	23
	Not Reported	3.3	59

Table 3 2008 National NASW Survey: Religious and Spiritual Orientations of Social Workers

	Percentage	Frequency
Primary Religious Orientations and Affiliations		
Buddhism	4.8	86
Christianity:		
Protestantism	26.9	486
Catholicism	17.8	321
Nondenominational	5.8	105
Unspecified	5.6	101
Latter-Day Saints	0.2	3
Eastern Orthodox	0.4	8
Subtotal Christian	56.8	1,024
Goddess Religion	0.1	1
Hinduism	0.2	3
Judaism:		
Reform	16.2	293
Conservative	2.3	42
Unspecified	1.2	21
Orthodox	0.5	9
Subtotal Jewish	20.2	365
Islamism	0.1	2
Spiritism/Shamanism	0.7	13
Traditional Native American (First Nations)	0.4	8
Traditional Hawaiian	0.1	1
Unitarian Universalism	0.7	13
Wicca	0.2	4
Religious Others ¹	0.5	9
Total Religious	84.8	1,529
Primary Nonreligious Spiritual Orientations		
Agnosticism	6.5	117
Atheism	2.9	53
Existentialism/Humanism	1.5	27
Nonaffiliated Jewish	3.0	54
Total Nonreligious	13.9	251
Other		
None (No spiritual affiliation)	0.1	2
Other—Unspecified	0.6	11
Not Reported	0.6	11

Note: ¹ Religious others includes unspecified multifait/interfaith (6 responders), Buddhism/Christianity (1 responder), Zen/Taoism/Episcopalian (1 responder), and Buddhism/Shamanism/Existentialism (1 responder).

**Table 4 2008 National NASW Survey:
Singular and Multiple Religious and Spiritual Orientations of Social Workers by Primary Affiliation**

	Total (n)	Singular Primary Affiliation Only (%)	(n)	Multiple Religious Orientation in Addition to Primary (%)	(n)	Multiple Non- Religious Orientation in Addition to Primary (%)	(n)
Primary Religious Orientations							
Buddhism	86	90.7	78	9.3	8		
Christianity:							
Protestantism	486	95.3	463	4.7	23		
Catholicism	321	94.1	302	5.9	19		
Nondenominational	105	90.5	95	9.5	10		
Unspecified	101	92.1	93	7.9	8		
Latter-Day Saints	3	66.7	2	33.3	1		
Eastern Orthodox	8	100.0	8				
Subtotal Christian	1,024	94.0	963	6.0	61		
Goddess Religion	1	100.0	1				
Hinduism	3	66.7	2	33.3	1		
Judaism:							
Reform	293	99.3	291	0.7	2		
Conservative	42	97.6	41	2.4	1		
Unspecified	21	81.0	17	19	4		
Orthodox	9	100.0	9				
Subtotal Jewish	365	98.1	358	1.9	7		
Islamism	2	100.0	2				
Spiritism/Shamanism	13	84.6	11	15.4	2		
Traditional Native American (First Nations)	8	100.0	8				
Traditional Hawaiian	1	100.0	1				
Unitarian Universalism	13	15.4	2	84.6	11		
Wicca	4	100.0	4				
Religious Others ¹	9			100.0	9		
Subtotal Primary Religious Orientations	1,529	93.5	1,430	6.5	99		
Primary Nonreligious Spiritual Orientations							
Agnosticism	117	94.0	110	1.7	2	4.3	5
Atheism	53	92.5	49			7.5	4
Existentialism/Humanism	27	74.1	20	7.4	2	18.5	5
Nonaffiliated Jewish	54	94.4	51			5.6	3
Subtotal Primary Nonreligious Spiritual Orientations	251	91.6	230	1.6	4	6.8	17
Other							
None (No primary religious/spiritual affiliation)	2	50.0	1	50.0	1		

Other—Unspecified	11	45.5	5	27.3	3	27.3	3
Not Reported	11	81.8	9			18.2	2
Percentage and Count for Total Sample	1,804	92.8	1,675	5.9	107	1.2	22

Note: ¹ Religious others includes unspecified multifaith/interfaith (6 responders), Buddhism/Christianity (1 responder), Zen/Taoism/Episcopalian (1 responder), and Buddhism/Shamanism/Existentialism (1 responder).

In general, as would be expected, those who claimed a religious affiliation were likely to have an average to high level of involvement in religious or spiritual activities, such as prayer and attendance at religious services. In contrast, atheists and agnostics were likely to have a low to average involvement in religious or spiritual activities.

Among those who indicated their level of religiosity (n=1760), 33.4% (n=587) were not at all religious, 48.1% (n=847) were somewhat religious, and 18.5% (n=326) were very religious. Among those who indicated their level of spirituality (n=1763), 3.7% (n=65) were not at all spiritual, 40.7% (n=718) were somewhat spiritual, and 55.6% (n=980) were very spiritual. In Table 3.6, 15.6 percent of the sample is both very religious and very spiritual. On the other hand, only 2.8 percent of respondents are neither religious nor spiritual.

Table 5 2008 National NASW Survey: Level of Religiosity by Level of Spirituality

	Not Spiritual % (n)	Somewhat Spiritual % (n)	Very Spiritual % (n)	Total % (n)
Not Religious	2.8 (49)	16.0 (279)	14.6 (255)	33.4 (583)
Somewhat Religious	0.6 (11)	22.1 (387)	25.5 (445)	48.2 (843)
Very Religious	0.2 (4)	2.6 (46)	15.6 (272)	18.4 (322)
Total	3.7 (64)	40.7 (712)	55.6 (972)	100% (1748)

Note: Fifty-six respondents did not indicate their level of religiosity and/or their level of spirituality.

Practice Issues

Twenty-two questions in the survey explored the appropriateness of social workers raising the topic of religion or spirituality with clients dealing with issues such as bereavement, substance abuse, sexual abuse, etc (see Table 6). Most social workers in our study believed that it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality in a nonsectarian manner with clients on every issue we explored, but especially regarding terminal illness, bereavement, substance abuse, and suffering effects of a natural disaster.

Most respondents also believed that it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion in cases of terminal illness, substance abuse, bereavement, foster and adoptive parenting, and suffering the effects of a natural disaster. But for every issue, fewer believed it was appropriate to raise the subject of religion rather than spirituality. These findings indicate that many social workers recognize the importance of spirituality and religion while also making a distinction in applying them to practice.

Unfortunately, as earlier studies also indicated, our national survey showed that nearly 65% did not receive content on spirituality or religion in their social work education. A majority of the responders agreed that social workers should become more knowledgeable about spiritual matters (66.1%, n=1,167) and religious matters (51.3%, n=906). Nearly 25% however, agreed that workers do not have the skill to assist clients in religious and spiritual matters. It appears from this that many social work practitioners do not feel adequately prepared to address religion or spirituality, even though they recognize its importance.

Table 6 Appropriate to Raise Topic of Religion/Spirituality by Client Issue

Raise topic of religion/spirituality with . . .	Religion			Spirituality		
	% Agree	\bar{X}	S	% Agree	\bar{X}	s
Terminal illness	74.9	3.81	1.06	86.1	4.15	0.92
Substance abuse	53.1	3.37	1.10	72.8	3.84	0.99
Foster parent	56.8	3.43	1.09	63.6	3.66	1.03
Adoptive parent	58.2	3.45	1.10	64.7	3.67	1.03
Difficult child or adolescent development	37.5	3.09	1.06	55.2	3.51	1.02
Sexual abuse	46.6	3.24	1.11	64.6	3.67	1.05
Partner violence	44.4	3.20	1.09	61.9	3.62	1.04
Suffering effects of natural disaster	56.3	3.43	1.08	71.2	3.78	1.02
Bereaved	72.1	3.75	1.03	81.9	4.05	0.91
Chronic mental disorder	36.5	3.06	1.08	52.2	3.45	1.06
Loss of job	37.1	3.08	1.06	54.0	3.48	1.05
Difficulty in family relations	43.7	3.19	1.05	59.6	3.56	1.01
Criminal justice	37.5	3.09	1.07	52.8	3.46	1.03

Note: A *t*-test of means showed a significant difference between religion and spirituality with clients presenting the same problem, with $p < 0.001$. Respondents were significantly more likely to believe it is appropriate to raise the topic of nonsectarian spirituality than religion.

Table 7 Appropriate to Raise Topic of Religion/Spirituality with Vulnerable Populations

Raise topic of religion/spirituality with . . .	Religion			Spirituality		
	% Agree	\bar{X}	S	% Agree	\bar{X}	S
Race, ethnicity, or national origin	42.7	3.18	1.09	59.2	3.56	1.03
Gender	40.6	3.13	1.09	56.1	3.51	1.05
Sexual Orientation	45.2	3.21	1.11	59.8	3.56	1.06
Older adulthood	42.7	3.17	1.11	60.1	3.58	1.04
Political beliefs	34.6	3.03	1.07	50.7	3.41	1.05
Religious beliefs	79.8	4.00	1.01	82.2	4.05	0.93
Disability	40.7	3.14	1.10	58.5	3.55	1.05
Poverty	39.3	3.10	1.10	55.9	3.51	1.03

Note: A *t*-test of means showed a significant difference between religion and spirituality with clients presenting the same issue, with $p < 0.001$, except for religious beliefs ($p < 0.05$). Respondents were significantly more likely to believe it is appropriate to raise the topic of nonsectarian spirituality than religion.

Social workers in the 2008 National Survey were also asked to indicate their level of agreement regarding the appropriateness of raising the topic of religion and spirituality with clients from vulnerable populations (see Table 7). A majority of respondents agreed that it is appropriate to raise the topic of spirituality with clients who are dealing with oppression. Although fewer

believed it was appropriate to raise the subject of religion than nonsectarian spirituality, a large majority of respondents agreed that it is appropriate to raise the topic of religion and of spirituality with clients who are experiencing religious oppression.

Ethical Guidelines for Using Spiritually Based Activities

The survey identified a wide range of spiritually oriented helping practices employed by social workers. These interventions are listed in Table 8.

Table 8 National NASW Survey: Practitioners' Views on Spiritually Oriented Helping Activities

Question	Have Personally Done with Clients		Is an Appropriate Social Work Helping Activity (Intervention)	
	(%)	(n)	(%)	(n)
8. Use or recommend religious or spiritual books or writings	55.8	985	76.5	1,308
9. Pray privately <i>for</i> a client	56.4	1,003	68.3	1,168
10. Pray privately <i>with</i> a client	27.1	478	44.8	750
11. Meditate to prepare <i>for</i> a client	66.3	1,175	86.3	1,478
12. Meditate <i>with</i> a client	30.5	539	60.4	1,020
13. Use religious language or concepts	66.0	1,169	73.3	1,265
14. Use nonsectarian spiritual language or concepts	84.2	1,491	90.7	1,581
15. Recommend participation in a religious or spiritual support system or activity	77.2	1,373	85.3	1,485
16. Touch clients for "healing" purposes	14.1	250	22.3	382
17. Help clients develop religious/spiritual rituals as a clinical intervention (e.g., house blessings, visiting graves of relatives, celebrating life transitions)	57.8	1,030	77.1	1,333
18. Participate in a client's religious/spiritual rituals as a practice intervention	17.5	311	32.3	553
19. Encourage clients to do regular religious/spiritual self-reflective diary keeping or journal keeping	51.1	905	78.8	1,371
20. Discuss role of religious or spiritual beliefs in relation to significant others	75.3	1,332	88.2	1,536
21. Assist clients to reflect critically on religious or spiritual beliefs or practices	57.4	1,009	73.2	1,253
22. Help clients assess the meaning of spiritual experiences that occur in dreams	40.6	714	67.9	1,155
23. Help clients consider the spiritual meaning and purpose of their current life situations	69.3	1,224	81.9	1,417
24. Help clients reflect on their beliefs about what happens after death	71.1	1,258	88.1	1,526
25. Help clients consider ways their religious/spiritual support systems are <i>helpful</i>	92.2	1,621	96.2	1,667
26. Help clients consider ways their religious/spiritual support systems are <i>harmful</i>	65.5	1,150	82.0	1,403
27. Refer clients to a clergy person, or other religious/spiritual helpers or leaders	74.8	1,319	89.5	1,551
28. Collaborate with a clergy person or other religious/spiritual leaders	59.2	1,045	85.9	1,473

Note: Valid percentages and frequencies are reported; missing cases have been excluded.

It is interesting to note that a higher percentage of respondents indicated it is appropriate to use a spiritually-oriented activity than those who actually did use it. For all but four activities (pray with a client, meditate with a client, touch for healing purposes, and participate in the client's religious/spiritual rituals as a practice intervention), more than 2/3 of respondents believed it is appropriate to use them. Also, except for the four least-approved activities above and dream assessment, more than half of respondents have actually used these helping activities. These findings show that most social workers recognize the usefulness and ethical appropriateness of a wide range of spiritually-oriented practices. The four least approved practices are most directive and intimately involved with a client's personal life space and boundaries, so it is understandable that workers would be cautious about them. Our findings in the area of ethical guidelines reflect these concerns.

Religious and Spiritual Practices of Respondents

The more a person participated in religious community services while in elementary school or adolescence, the more s/he will participate in organized religion or spiritual support groups as adults. A large majority of the respondents (85.1%, n=1,521) had attended religious services at least once a month during childhood. In adulthood, a majority of respondents (50.9%, n=902) participated in religious services at least once a month, and a larger majority (81.1%, n=1,443) participated in private religious and/or spiritual practices at least once a month. Only a small minority of respondents felt negative about their childhood religious experiences (16.5%, n=293) and spiritual experiences (6.3%, n=114). Respondents were even more positive about their adulthood religious and spiritual experiences. Only 13.6% (n=242) felt negative about their current religious experiences, and 2% (n=36) felt negative about their current spiritual experiences.

NASW Code of Ethics

Overall, a minority of responders agreed that "integrating religion and spirituality in social work practice conflicts with the NASW Code of Ethics" (12.5%, n=220) or "social work's mission" (13.2%, n=232). Over 84% (n=1,511) of responders believe that church-state separation does not prevent them from dealing with religion in practice. Over 91% (n=1,636) believe it does not prevent them from dealing with nonsectarian spirituality in practice. This confirms that most social workers are likely to feel that dealing with spirituality and religion in practice is consistent with professional values.

Referral of Client to Clergy or Spiritual Leader

Among those who responded in 2008, 74.8% (n=1,319) had actually referred clients to a clergyperson or other religious or spiritual leader. Another 89.5% (n=1,551) indicated that referring clients to clergy was an appropriate helping activity. Over 59% (n=1,045) among those who responded had also collaborated with clergy or other religious or spiritual leaders, and 85.9% (n=1,473) believed that collaboration was an appropriate helping activity. These findings are encouraging in that a large majority of social workers are very receptive to referral and collaboration as appropriate helping activities.

Forgiveness Issues

We asked two questions that dealt with forgiveness issues in our 2008 National Survey. Among those who responded, 63.8% (n=1,127) indicated that it is important to help clients assess whether they wish to work on forgiveness, and 72.3% (n=1,271) of the respondents use techniques in their practice that deal with forgiveness. This finding is similar to the 1997 National survey. At that time, 60% of respondents believed it is important to assess whether a client would benefit from work on forgiveness, and another 74% used forgiveness techniques. This finding suggests that many respondents still use techniques in practice that relate to forgiveness without assessing whether the client wishes to do so. This puzzling result calls for a reminder of the importance of assessment and matching a helping technique to the client's preference.

Informed Consent

It was clear that the social workers in this survey did not feel that informing clients about their own belief systems when establishing the helping relationship was important. Nearly 70% (N=1,256) disagreed that it was important.

Religious History

When asked whether taking a client's religious history or a spiritual history should be part of intake and assessment, 58.1% (N=1,043) of the social workers in the study agreed that a religious history should be taken and 59.8% (N=1,076) believed that a spiritual history should be taken.

Furthermore, only 33 percent (n=586) of respondents agreed that social workers should introduce religion or spirituality in the helping relationship at their own discretion; nearly 54 percent (n=949) felt that the client should first express interest.

Definition of Terms by Respondents

This survey explored the ways that social workers understand the three common terms: *spirituality*, *religion*, and *faith*. We initially offered our own definitions of spirituality and religion so that respondents would have common meanings of the terms in mind when completing the survey. In addition, at the conclusion, we asked people to identify the descriptors (e.g. meaning, purpose, belief) that they relate to the terms *spirituality*, *religion*, and *faith*, aside from our definitions. Respondents clearly saw a close relationship between these terms, as nearly every descriptor had overlap for some people. However, a clear pattern of distinction between the terms emerged by comparing the top six descriptors for each (See Table 9).

Table 9 National NASW Survey: Top Six Descriptors Selected in Each Category

Religion	%	Spirituality	%	Faith	%
Belief	79	Meaning	85	Belief	87
Ritual	79	Personal	82	Personal Relationship with Higher Power	58
Organization	74	Purpose	79	Personal	55
Scripture	72	Values	73	Meaning	50
Prayer	71	Belief	69	Purpose	45
Community	69	Personal Relationship with Higher Power	67	Prayer	40

Note: Percents indicate percentage of respondents who selected a descriptor associated with a given term.

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