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Sunuş

Değerli Okurlar,

Din Psikolojisi Derneği'nin resmî yayını olan *Research on the Psychology of Religion* dergisinin ilk sayısını sizlerle buluşturmaktan büyük bir memnuniyet duyuyorum. Din psikolojisi alanındaki bilimsel bilgi birikimini geliştirmeyi ve ulusal ve uluslararası düzeyde akademik etkileşimi güçlendirmeyi hedefleyen dergimizin, alanın gelişimine önemli katkılar sunacağına inanıyorum.

Derneğimizin bilimsel vizyonunu yansıtan bu yayın, dinî ve manevi yaşamın psikolojik boyutlarını ele alan özgün araştırmalar için nitelikli bir akademik platform oluşturmayı amaçlamaktadır. Disiplinlerarası yaklaşımları teşvik eden, çift-kör hakemlik sürecini esas alan ve uluslararası akademik standartları gözetken yayın politikamızla, alanın güncel tartışmalarına ve yeni araştırma ufuklarına katkı sağlamayı hedefliyoruz.

Bu ilk sayının hazırlanmasında emeği geçen editörlerimize, yayın kurulu üyelerimize, hakemlerimize ve değerli yazarlarımıza teşekkür ediyorum. *Research on the Psychology of Religion* dergisinin bilimsel diyalogu güçlendirmesini, özgün araştırmaları teşvik etmesini ve din psikolojisi alanının gelişimine kalıcı katkılar sunmasını temenni ediyorum.

Saygılarımla,

Prof. Dr. Hasan KAPLAN

İmtiyaz Sahibi, Research on the Psychology of Religion

Din Psikolojisi Derneği adına

Research on the Psychology of Religion

Volume 1, Issue 1 | March 2026

Foreword

Dear Readers,

It is a great pleasure to present the inaugural issue of *Research on the Psychology of Religion*, the official journal of the Turkish Association for the Psychology of Religion. Established with the aim of promoting high-quality scholarship and fostering academic exchange at both national and international levels, this journal seeks to contribute to the growing body of knowledge in the psychology of religion.

As the official publication of the Association, our journal is dedicated to advancing scientific research on the psychological dimensions of religious and spiritual life. By embracing interdisciplinary perspectives, maintaining a rigorous double-blind peer-review process, and adhering to international academic standards, we aspire to provide a respected platform for scholars from diverse academic backgrounds and cultural contexts.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to our editors, editorial board members, reviewers, and authors whose valuable contributions have made this first issue possible. It is my hope that *Research on the Psychology of Religion* will strengthen scholarly dialogue, encourage innovative research, and contribute meaningfully to the continued development of the psychology of religion.

Sincerely,

Prof. Dr. Hasan KAPLAN

Publisher, Research on the Psychology of Religion

On behalf of the Turkish Association for the Psychology of Religion

Research on the Psychology of Religion

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Editörden

Türkiye’de din psikolojisi alanında yürütülen çalışmalar uzun yıllardır hem nitelik hem de nicelik bakımından dikkat çekici bir gelişim göstermektedir. *Research on the Psychology of Religion*, bu akademik birikimin uluslararası düzeyde daha görünür hâle gelmesine ve daha geniş bir okuyucu kitlesine ulaşmasına katkı sunmak amacıyla yayın hayatına başlamaktadır.

Din Psikolojisi Derneği’nin resmî yayın organı olan dergimiz; din psikolojisi alanındaki özgün ampirik araştırmaları, teorik tartışmaları, sistematik literatür derlemelerini ve kitap değerlendirmelerini bilim dünyasıyla buluşturmayı hedeflemektedir. Nicel, nitel, karma yöntemli ve teorik çalışmalara açık bir yayın politikası benimseyerek yöntemsel çeşitliliği alanın gelişimi açısından önemli bir zenginlik olarak görüyoruz.

Dergimiz İngilizce yayımlanmakla birlikte her makalede Türkçe özete yer verilmektedir. Bu tercih, uluslararası akademik diyaloga katılma hedefi ile Türkçe akademik literatüre katkı sunma sorumluluğunu birlikte taşıma arzusundan kaynaklanmaktadır. Türkiye’de üretilen bilimsel bilginin yalnızca ulusal sınırlar içerisinde dolaşmaması, aynı zamanda uluslararası literatüre katkı sağlayan bir niteliğe kavuşması gerektiğine inanıyoruz.

Bu ilk sayıda dindarlık ve ahlâkî tutumlar arasındaki ilişki, palyatif bakımda manevi danışmanlık süreçleri, Sufi maneviyatında otoriter örüntüler ve dindar kimlik tipolojileri gibi farklı temaları ele alan araştırmalara yer verilmiştir. Sayı ayrıca bir kitap değerlendirmesiyle zenginleştirilmiştir. Bu çalışmaların din psikolojisi alanındaki güncel tartışmalara katkı sunmasını ümit ediyoruz.

Amacımız, din psikolojisi alanında yürütülen araştırmalar için güvenilir, nitelikli ve uluslararası görünürlüğe sahip bir yayın platformu oluşturmaktır. Bu süreçte katkı sunan yazarlarımıza, hakemlerimize ve yayın kurulumuzun değerli üyelerine içtenlikle teşekkür ediyorum. Dergimiz, gönüllülük anlayışıyla bir araya gelen bir ekibin ortak emeğiyle hayata geçirilmiştir. Bu sürecin pek çok aşamasında özverili destek sunan tüm ekip arkadaşlarımıza özellikle teşekkürlerimi sunarım. Dergimizin din psikolojisi alanına hayırlı olmasını temenni ederim.

Dr. Ali Koçak

Editör, Research on the Psychology of Religion

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From the Editor

Scholarly work on the psychology of religion in Türkiye has shown remarkable growth over the years, both in terms of quality and quantity. *Research on the Psychology of Religion* has begun publication with the aim of contributing to the international visibility of this tradition and making it accessible to a broader academic audience.

As the official publication of the Turkish Association for the Psychology of Religion, the journal seeks to bring together original empirical research, theoretical discussions, systematic literature reviews, and book evaluations in the field of psychology of religion. We adopt an inclusive publication policy that welcomes quantitative, qualitative, mixed-method, and theoretical contributions, and we regard methodological diversity as an important asset for the advancement of the field.

Although our journal is published in English, each article includes a Turkish abstract. This choice reflects our dual commitment: to participate in international academic dialogue while also contributing to the Turkish-language scholarly literature. We believe that scientific knowledge produced in Türkiye should not circulate solely within national boundaries, but should also engage with and contribute to the international literature.

This inaugural issue includes studies addressing a range of themes: the relationship between religiosity and moral attitudes, spiritual counseling in palliative care, authoritarian patterns in Sufi spirituality, and typologies of religious identity. A book review further enriches the issue. We hope these contributions will advance ongoing discussions in the psychology of religion.

Our goal is to establish a reliable, high-quality, and internationally visible publication platform for research in the psychology of religion. I extend my sincere gratitude to the authors, reviewers, and members of the editorial board who have contributed to this endeavor. This journal has been brought to life through the collective effort of a group of volunteers who came together with a shared purpose. I wish to express my particular appreciation to all the members of our team who generously devoted their time and effort at every stage of this process. May this journal be a lasting contribution to the field of psychology of religion.

Ali Koçak, Ph.D.

Editor, Research on the Psychology of Religion

Research Article

The Relationship Between Religiosity and Some Moral Attitudes and Values

Dindarlığın Bazı Ahlaki Tutum ve Değerlerle İlişkisi

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Abstract

This article examines the relationship between religiosity and selected moral attitudes, value orientations, and social behaviors through a systematic literature review based on empirical findings from both Western literature and research conducted in Türkiye. Rather than relying on purely theoretical or normative assumptions, the study focuses on how religiosity is reflected in concrete domains of moral life. In this framework, key areas such as honesty and academic cheating, substance use, sexual behavior, social deviance and crime, value orientations, prosocial behavior, forgiveness, and work ethics are systematically reviewed. The findings indicate that religiosity does not exert a uniform or deterministic influence across all moral domains. While the relationship between religiosity and behaviors such as honesty and academic cheating appears weak or inconsistent, religiosity demonstrates a more consistent and protective role in areas such as alcohol, tobacco, and illicit substance use. Evidence related to sexual behavior suggests that higher levels of religiosity are associated with more conservative attitudes and lower engagement in premarital and risky sexual practices. In the context of social deviance and crime, the influence of religiosity appears limited and context-dependent, though it may function as a deterrent under certain conditions. In contrast, the impact of religiosity on value orientations is more pronounced. Religiosity is positively associated with values such as tradition, conformity, benevolence, and security, while showing negative associations with hedonism, stimulation, and self-direction. Moreover, religiosity is linked to prosocial tendencies such as empathy, helping behavior, charitable giving, and forgiveness, although these effects are often confined to in-group contexts. Overall, the article argues that religiosity does not operate as an absolute determinant of moral attitudes and behaviors but produces selective and context-sensitive effects through normative, integrative, and motivational mechanisms.

Keywords: Religiosity, Moral Attitudes, Value Orientations, Prosocial Behavior, Substance Use, Sexual Behavior; Social Deviance, Forgiveness.

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Özet

Bu makale, Batı literatüründeki ampirik bulgular ile Türkiye’de yürütülen araştırmalara dayanan sistematik bir literatür taraması aracılığıyla, dindarlık ile belirli ahlaki tutumlar, değer yönelimleri ve sosyal davranışlar arasındaki ilişkiyi incelemektedir. Kuramsal ve normatif varsayımlardan ziyade, dindarlığın ahlaki yaşantının somut alanlarındaki yansımaları ele alınmaktadır. Bu çerçevede dürüstlük ve akademik hile, madde kullanımı, cinsel davranışlar, toplumsal sapma ve suç, değer yönelimleri, toplum yanlısı davranışlar, affedicilik ve çalışma ahlakı gibi başlıca alanlara odaklanılmaktadır. Araştırma bulguları, dindarlığın tüm ahlaki alanlarda tekdüze ve belirleyici bir etki oluşturmadığını göstermektedir. Dürüstlük ve kopya çekme gibi davranışlarda dindarlık ile ilişki zayıf veya tutarsız görünürken; alkol, sigara ve uyuşturucu kullanımı gibi alanlarda dindarlığın daha tutarlı ve koruyucu bir rol oynadığı görülmektedir. Cinsel davranışlara ilişkin bulgular, yüksek dindarlık düzeylerinin daha muhafazakâr tutumlar, evlilik öncesi ve riskli cinsel davranışlarda azalma ile ilişkili olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Toplumsal sapma ve suç bağlamında ise dindarlığın etkisinin sınırlı ve bağlama bağlı olduğu, ancak bazı durumlarda caydırıcı bir işlev görebildiği anlaşılmaktadır. Buna karşılık, dindarlığın değer yönelimleri üzerindeki etkisinin daha belirgin olduğu; özellikle geleneksellik, uyum, iyilikseverlik ve güvenlik gibi değerlere olumlu, hazcılık, uyarılım ve özyönelim gibi değerlere ise olumsuz yönde ilişkili olduğu görülmektedir. Ayrıca dindarlığın empati, yardım etme, bağış ve affedicilik gibi toplum yanlısı eğilimlerle ilişkili olduğu, ancak bu etkinin çoğu zaman grup içi sınırlar içinde kaldığı anlaşılmaktadır. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, dindarlığın ahlaki tutum ve davranışları mutlak biçimde belirleyen bir unsur olmadığını; ancak normatif, bütünleştirici ve motivasyonel mekanizmalar aracılığıyla seçici ve bağlama duyarlı etkiler ürettiğini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dindarlık, Ahlaki Tutumlar, Değer Yönelimleri, Toplum Yanlısı Davranış, Madde Kullanımı, Cinsel Davranışlar, Toplumsal Sapma, Affedicilik.

Introduction

Does an individual's religiosity make a difference in their moral attitudes and behaviors? In other words, is there a noticeable difference between being religious and being moral and possessing certain values? Leaving aside theoretical considerations, how do these questions manifest in real life? This article seeks to answer these questions in the context of some research findings.

It is generally accepted that religious people tend to be more “conservative” in many respects. Conservatism, in its traditional sense, differs from other schools of thought by opposing the dismantling of established values and institutions, and by being sensitive to religious and moral issues. Similar attitudes and understandings are encountered in countries like the US, as well as in our own country, regarding issues such as abortion and homosexuality. A review of numerous studies conducted in the West reveals much data supporting this view. According to these studies, those who are generally more religious exhibit a stance against abortion, divorce, pornography, contraception, premarital sex, homosexuality, feminism, nudity in advertisements, heavy metal and rap music, and topless women on beaches. Conversely, religious individuals tend to support issues such as marriage, the death penalty, revenge, traditional gender roles, conservative political parties, harsher penalties, and the censorship of sexuality and violence in mass media.

It is understandable that religiosity leads to a tendency to preserve and perpetuate traditional moral values. Religious teachings emphasize order, justice, compassion, responsibility, and goodness

in society, while establishing avoidance of harmful and destructive behaviors as a rule of conduct. However, the relationship between religion and moral issues should not be considered fixed and unchanging. It is a fact that many other factors outside of religion influence moral behavior. Furthermore, according to Kohlberg, moral maturity, in the sense of adopting attitudes and behaviors consistent with our moral judgments, does not occur before the age of 21 (Kohlberg, 1973). The development of attitudes and behaviors consistent with this ideal principle of conduct can develop at different levels in the life of each religious person, depending on many different variables. Therefore, it seems that religious individuals' ability to exhibit the moral principles they have adopted according to their belief system is possible both through internalizing their religious beliefs and by fulfilling the biological conditions required for moral maturity.

In this study, empirical findings from both Western literature and research conducted in Türkiye are brought together through a systematic review approach, adopting a descriptive method based on a comprehensive survey of the relevant literature. To understand in which areas religiosity makes a difference, it would be appropriate to take a look at the results of the research conducted.

Honesty and Religiosity

According to research conducted in the West, academic cheating is very common in high schools and universities, including among students in religious schools. 92% of religious school students stated that cheating is morally wrong, and 87% supported the idea that “If everyone else is cheating, why shouldn't I?” Similarly, one study revealed that 72% of a group of religious school students admitted to cheating on exams. When encouraged to lie and cheat, both religious and secular high school students showed “surprisingly high rates of cheating.” It appears that cheating is quite common among high school and university students, even those who consider themselves religious. Ultimately, no correlation was found between religion and honesty or cheating. Subsequent research, including measures of behavior and different samples, confirmed that religion does not reduce cheating behavior. While some more religious individuals reported being more honest than less religious individuals, these findings contradict research indicating no correlation and even a positive correlation between lie scale scores and religiosity. More importantly, there is little evidence to suggest that religious people are more honest or less likely to lie or cheat compared to less religious or non-religious people. Conversely, it has been observed that more religious people are less likely to commit tax fraud (Hood et al., 2009, pp. 383-87).

Similar to examples in the West, various studies conducted in different departments of our country's universities show an increase in student cheating behavior in recent years. Experts believe that cheating is widespread among students at a rate of 75-90%. While cheating is perceived by students as partly dishonest, haram, and sinful, they state that students with low self-esteem cheat more, that cheating is mostly unrelated to conscience, that the education system forces students to cheat, and that students who cheat are sometimes perceived as honest. Students have been found to experience a certain degree of discomfort when they cheat. Those who consider cheating morally

unacceptable tend to cheat less, while those who do engage in cheating often do so consciously, despite recognizing that the behavior is wrong. In one study, most students (73%) identified themselves as religious; however, a substantial proportion (38.7%) reported that their beliefs did not influence their level of cheating. The proportion of students who stated that “being religious affects my cheating” (12.9%) was identical to that of those who indicated that it affects their behavior because it constitutes a violation of others’ rights (12.9%). These research findings indicate either no correlation or a very low correlation between cheating and religiosity. Furthermore, it was found that students felt uncomfortable after cheating but not after giving someone else the answers. According to the researcher, it is quite concerning that students who identify themselves as religious see no problem in exhibiting unethical behavior during the exam (Küçüktepe, 2014, pp. 263-719).

Another study reveals that cheating is a problem even among theology students. The results indicate that 65% of theology students reported engaging in cheating during their studies, albeit at varying frequencies. The majority of students consider cheating a “bad behavior that should be prevented.” However, they do not perceive cheating as a morally reprehensible act like theft. Only a low percentage (6.4%) agrees with the idea that “cheating is theft and should definitely be punished.” Conversely, a considerable percentage want cheating to be tolerated. The fact that students who cheat are often described as “students who don't study regularly” supports this idea. The percentage of those who consider cheating a behavioral disorder is extremely low. These results may primarily be related to the lack of a clear ruling in religious sources regarding cheating being an immoral act. Indeed, a large majority of students do not see the issue as a moral problem (Kaymakcan 2002, pp. 127-138).

Substance Use and Religiosity

The religious teachings of different groups generally oppose alcohol and illegal drugs. Therefore, it might be expected that faith would be associated with less substance use/abuse. The current literature confirms this. Studies from before the mid-1970s and research from the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s consistently confirmed that more religious individuals (according to different definitions) consumed less alcohol and drugs.

Religiosity, particularly participation in religious activities, is associated with lower levels of alcohol consumption among university students. In Canadian hospitalized patients, those who practiced religious worship more frequently had lower current and past alcohol consumption. Similarly, a significant negative association was found between religious participation and alcohol consumption within six hours of entering emergency care. The importance of religion resulted in a lower rate of initiation of alcohol consumption, lower alcohol consumption, and a lower likelihood of excessive drinking among high school seniors. Similar findings exist regarding tobacco. Religiosity was found to be consistently and negatively associated with different types of substance abuse among high school seniors. Furthermore, these findings are valid regardless of age and gender,

with various exceptions across different cultures. Parental religiosity may also be associated with lower substance use among children.

The inverse relationship between religion and substance use/abuse involves many factors, and numerous theories have been proposed to explain this relationship. Almost all of these studies focus on the social control function of religion: Religious institutions and traditions maintain social order by deterring deviance, flaws, and self-harming behaviors. Furthermore, religion prevents substance use through norms and values that support personal restraint. This is referred to as the ‘normative’ function of religion, whereby religion dictates to a reference group what attitudes and behaviors should be adopted toward alcohol and other substances. Additionally, some experts suggest that religion can be an alternative way to meet basic needs (as an alternative to drugs and alcohol), such as relieving grief or social anxiety, or providing an alternative to feelings of meaninglessness and exclusion. This second mechanism is the “integrative” function of religion, meaning the religious group provides an understanding of acceptance for the individual, and this social support leads to less reliance on anxiety-reducing mechanisms like alcohol and drugs. Some have argued that religion, in addition to its social control mechanisms, indirectly reduces alcohol and drug use/abuse by “promoting environmental and psychological values that restrict risk-taking.” What is suggested here is that religion attempts to elicit positive behaviors through family harmony and parental support, as well as by promoting pro-community values and social competence. Other studies have shown that religious youth generally avoid behaviors that endanger their health and engage in behaviors that improve their health. Furthermore, it has been suggested that self-control and lower personal tolerance for deviance also play a role in the effect of religiosity on substance use. Parental support and lower levels of parent-child conflict have also been found to reduce substance use.

It has been suggested that religious beliefs act as a buffer for university students and can deter individuals from deciding to use alcohol and drugs. In this sense, religion may play a role in prevention. However, numerous studies have now shown that spirituality and religiosity are helpful factors in the process of substance use recovery. This is generally because individuals who lead a more religious or spiritual life exhibit positive mental health characteristics such as higher coping skills and optimism, and high social support. Moreover, those who report being more religious have been able to protect themselves from illicit drugs for longer periods during the first 6 months of the treatment program and have been more successful in overcoming addiction. Religious or spiritual emphasis in treatment programs has been shown to contribute moderately positively to treatment outcomes. It has been suggested that patients show spiritual growth during substance use treatment with a spiritual emphasis, and that this treatment, which provides a sense of meaning and hope, can be effective in the outcome of treatment. The most prominent cause-and-effect interpretation is that greater religiosity somehow protects individuals from substance use and abuse. However, it seems logical that substance use reduces religiosity. For example, adolescents who experiment with alcohol and drugs may give less importance to religion in their lives, and religious prohibitions on substance use may make religious teachings seem less suitable and therefore less important to them. At least a

reciprocal causal relationship can be found between religiosity and substance use (Hood et al. 2009, pp. 387-393).

In one study (Yıldırım, 1997) conducted among university students, 42% of the total students stated that they smoked. Among these students, 39% described their family as “religious,” 57% as “somewhat religious,” and 4% as “atheist.” In contrast, 37% of students whose families were “religious,” 46% of those whose families were “somewhat religious,” and 60% of those whose families were “atheist” smoked. The differences between the percentages were found to be significant. Overall, the findings indicate that as the level of religiosity in the family increases, and consequently, as the level of religiosity among students who smoke increases, a significant decrease in the rate of smoking is observed. A similar pattern emerges when considering students’ own religiosity. Among those who reported smoking, 14% identified as “religious,” 63% as “somewhat religious,” and 23% as “atheist.” Correspondingly, 23% of “religious” students, 45% of “somewhat religious” students, and 66% of “atheist” students reported smoking, with these differences also reaching statistical significance. Taken together, these results suggest that smoking rates increase as individual religiosity decreases. These findings are consistent with the findings regarding the level of religiosity within the family. Based on these findings, it can be said that religious values are one of the factors preventing young people from developing a smoking habit.

According to the same study, 62% of university students use alcohol to varying degrees. It is noteworthy that approximately 25% of students use alcohol several times a week or daily. Within this 25% group, it can be assumed that 2% use alcohol daily and are therefore alcoholics, while 23% are at risk of addiction. When students who use alcohol are examined according to their families' level of religiosity, it is seen that 15% of students who describe their families as “religious” use alcohol; 33% of those who describe their families as “somewhat religious” use alcohol; and 51% of those who describe their religiosity as “atheist” use alcohol daily or several times a week. The differences between the percentages are considered significant. As can be seen, as the level of religiosity of the family decreases, a parallel increase in the rate of students who use alcohol is observed. Based on these results, it can be said that a quarter of university students are at risk of alcohol use, regardless of their level of religiosity or gender; however, children from atheist families are at slightly higher risk than children from religious families. When students who consume alcohol were examined according to their level of religiosity, it was observed that 25% of the students identified themselves as “religious,” 60% as “somewhat religious,” and 15% as “atheist.” Of the students who stated that they consumed alcohol daily, 27% were “somewhat religious,” and 73% were “atheist.” None of the religious students reported daily alcohol use. Furthermore, while the percentage of those who consumed alcohol several times a week was 5% within the religious group, this rate was 27% for the somewhat religious group and 36% for the atheists. The differences between the percentages were found to be statistically significant. As can be understood, the risk of alcohol use increases in groups as the level of religiosity decreases.

In the same study, 2% of the total students stated that they were using drugs. When drug users were examined according to their families' level of religiosity, it was observed that 50% of the students using drugs had families that were “religious,” 33% had families that were “somewhat religious,” and 17% had families that were “atheist.” A group-wise analysis revealed that drug use was reported by 2% of students from ‘religious’ families, 1% from ‘somewhat religious’ families, and 13% from ‘atheist’ families. The differences between the percentages were statistically significant. As shown by the results, as the level of religiosity of the family decreases, a significant increase is observed in the rate of drug use among young people from those families. When drug users were examined according to their level of religiosity, 17% of these students considered themselves “religious,” 58% considered themselves “somewhat religious,” and 25% considered themselves “atheist.” When each group is examined within itself, it is understood that 1% of the “religious” group, 2% of the “somewhat religious” group, and 3% of the “atheist” group use drugs. However, the differences between the percentages were not found to be significant. As can be seen, regardless of the students' level of religiosity, there are students who use drugs in every group (Yıldırım, 1997, 149-152). Another study found that Marmara University students with higher levels of religiosity consumed fewer cigarettes and alcohol (Ayten, 2013, p. 27).

In our country, rehabilitation centers established by members of some religious sects conduct studies within the framework of a faith-centered rehabilitation program to combat substance addiction, and significant results are obtained (Kızmaz & Çevik, 2016; Gürsu, 2017). Some of the activities or programs carried out within the scope of religious communities or associations affiliated with them have a process that also uses extremely modern treatment techniques. However, since the stages in the process always derive their motivation from faith and submission, the spiritual dimension of the work is extremely important.

Within this framework, based on the social learning perspective, it is argued that religion, due to the positive reinforcing function of religious peer groups, has a deterrent effect on crime by causing individuals to exhibit religious behavior. For individuals with substance addiction, being part of a religious peer group can play a supportive role in their recovery process. This is because the offending individual receives stimuli according to the nature of their peer group. In short, the reference group fulfills a deterrent role in crime by providing and reinforcing moral clarity. On the other hand, it can also be argued that emotional forms such as “fear of God,” “shame before God,” “fear of hell,” and “the reward of heaven” deter them from committing crimes. According to this theory, the fear stemming from belief in supernatural sanctions and punishments, and the expectation of reward for performing actions that religion demands of individuals, are thought to deter individuals from committing crimes. According to the fear of hell hypothesis, religiosity has a function at the individual level that can prevent individuals from committing crimes. At this stage, the spiritual support they receive motivates and encourages them to do so. The Sufi principle of seeking repentance and submitting to the protection of a spiritual guide gives strength and morale to addicts who cannot cope with the substance on their own. The idea of starting a new life under

the guidance of a spiritual guide lightens the heavy burden of the struggle against addiction. However, the process does not stop at this motivation alone; it involves maintaining motivation and providing institutional support to overcome the many difficulties faced by substance users. In the context of faith-based approaches to addiction, one of the most important stages of the program under consideration is resocialization. Resocialization primarily aims to repair family relationships. Acquiring a new social environment is another important feature of this program.

Sexual Behaviors and Religiosity

Religion has traditionally accepted that sexuality is appropriate only for its reproductive function within a marital relationship. Therefore, almost all forms of sexual expression outside of heterosexual marriage are considered inappropriate and sinful. These norms have remained strong and fixed for centuries. Despite some denominational differences, research in the West has generally shown that strong religious belief and participation are associated with a decrease in reported extramarital sexual activity, particularly premarital sex. This finding, despite these denominational differences, is supported by a considerable body of research literature. For example, a longitudinal study in New Zealand showed that men and women engaged in religious activities (measured at ages 11 and 21) abstained from sexual intercourse until at least age 21. Other studies also show that different measures of religiosity lead to a decrease in premarital sex. Much of this study was conducted on adolescents. The general pattern of results found in adolescents is also applicable to adults. The number of premarital sexual partners is lower within the religious population, partly due to the moral disapproval of premarital sex; the association between religiosity and premarital sex is almost identical in men and women. Analysis of accumulated data from general social surveys revealed that religious individuals were more likely to disapprove of premarital sex, extramarital sex, and homosexuality compared to less religious individuals. Consequently, the consistent tendency for religion to negatively correlate with attitudes and behaviors towards extramarital sex is largely uncontroversial (Hood et al., 2009, pp. 394-397).

A study conducted in our country shows that the most influential factor on conservative family values is religious beliefs. The fundamental tenets of Islam, conservative family values, and traditional gender roles are found to have the highest value. Frequency of worship was found to have the highest influence level after religious beliefs, both in terms of score and in relation to conservative family values and traditional gender roles. In conclusion, it is stated that religiosity is the most influential factor on attitudes towards family values. Regarding the relationship between religiosity and conservative family values, it is concluded that religiosity largely influences conservative attitudes (Doğan, 2016).

To protect against sexually transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS, avoiding risky sexual behaviors that could lead to transmission is of great importance, especially for adolescents. Most studies investigating the relationship between religiosity and risky sexual behaviors focus on polygamy, early onset of sexual activity, and unprotected sex, frequently examining adolescents and young adult

college students as their participant groups. While some studies have found a strong association between religiosity and risky sexual behavior, others have found no association or have yielded conflicting results.

Research has yielded significant findings suggesting that certain cultural norms, such as religiosity, reduce the likelihood of engaging in risky sexual behavior. The effect of religiosity on risky sexual behavior varies depending on age and type of religiosity; it is more protective in adolescents than in younger adults, and more protective in girls than in boys. Furthermore, intrinsic religiosity is more effective than extrinsic religiosity. Based on these findings, it has been argued that religiosity is negatively correlated with sexual risk-taking behavior and that it reduces risky sexuality. While research results measuring the effects of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity components on adolescent risky sexual behavior show variability, a significant portion indicate that both components are associated with sexual risk-taking. Intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity have a positive effect, particularly on risky sexual behaviors such as polygamy and early sexual initiation, reducing polygamy while increasing the age of sexual initiation. Almost all studies on young adulthood have focused on the sexual behavior of university students. Studies examining the effects of religiosity on risky sexual behavior among university students have generally found that the level of religiosity among young people is related to conservative sexuality and that religious students, especially female university students, seek emotional connection in sexual relationships. Since seeking emotional connection in relationships reduces promiscuity, it has been concluded that this has a lowering effect on HIV risk (Kıyloğlu, 2014).

A study investigating attitudes towards premarital sexual relations in our country was conducted on 150 Middle East Technical University students and found that being religious and traditional negatively affected engaging in premarital sexual relations, and that university students with religious attitudes did not approve of premarital relationships (Sakallı & Karakurt, 2001, p. 26).

In another study evaluating participants' premarital sexual experiences, those who had no experience with masturbation or sexual intercourse were found to have a higher rate of intensive daily religious practices compared to those who masturbated or had experience with intercourse. The result of the study suggests that those who did not masturbate or did not experience sexual intercourse avoided behaviors they considered sinful for religious reasons. The intensity of religious practice is a significant factor influencing premarital sexual experience and conservative sexual beliefs. Having conservative sexual beliefs and avoiding premarital sexual experience are interrelated (Eşsizoglu et al., 2009; Kaya et al., 2007).

One of the significant factors influencing attitudes and behaviors towards homosexuals is the level of religiosity. Studies have reported that individuals with strong religious beliefs have negative attitudes towards homosexuals. It has been emphasized that negative attitudes towards homosexuals increase with increasing levels of religiosity. A meta-analysis examining religiosity and attitudes towards lesbians and gays revealed an inverse relationship between various forms of religiosity (participation in religious activities, intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity, etc.) and attitudes towards lesbians

and gays; negative attitudes increase as the level of religiosity increases. According to a study on attitudes towards homosexuals in Türkiye, being religious, traditional, and conservative causes attitudes towards homosexuality and homosexuals to shift in a negative direction. The data obtained in this study revealed a relationship between attitudes towards gays and attitudes towards gays and lesbians and the level of religiosity; however, there was no relationship between attitudes towards lesbians and the level of religiosity. It was determined that as the level of religiosity increases, individuals' attitudes towards gays also increase negatively. Studies have shown that university students with strong religious beliefs also have negative attitudes towards homosexuals. A study examining the relationship between physical education teacher candidates' attitudes toward lesbians and gay men and their level of religiosity found that negative attitudes toward both groups increased as religiosity levels increased (Saraç, 2014).

Social Deviance, Criminal Behavior, and Religiosity

Social deviance refers to socially unacceptable behavior, characteristics, or conditions that violate acceptable standards of appearance or behavior within a group. When individuals fail to act virtuously or cause harm to others, crime/guilt are broadly considered moral feelings or moral influences. The two most common sources of crime are failure of self-control and violations of interpersonal boundaries. The desire to avoid committing crimes can be said to be one of the most important and powerful motivators of moral behavior.

Religion can be defined as institutions and processes that make the social world understandable and bind individuals to the social order with strong ties. Common sense argues that religious ties should lead to lower crime rates. The theoretical foundations of this inverse relationship can be traced back to Durkheim's (1915) theory of social integration, concerning the social roots of religion and its place in society. Durkheim argued that religion is inseparable from the social order, playing a crucial role in legitimizing and reinforcing the values and norms of society. Religions provide certain rewards. Religious people expect to gain more benefit from engaging in accepted behaviors than non-religious people, and the harm that social deviance or crime would bring is greater for them. In this sense, avoiding punishment and seeking reward leads religious people to deviate or commit crimes less than non-religious people. This effect occurs in several ways: First, religion generally shares the same values as many in society as a whole. Therefore, religiously inclined people have strong ties to values that reject social deviance. Second, religion offers this otherworldly hope of punishment and reward. Third, religious institutions produce religious networks. These networks offer rewarding social relationships, and these relationships can be jeopardized by deviant behavior.

In line with these views, a review and meta-analysis of 60 studies published between 1967 and 1998 concluded that religious beliefs and practices generally show a moderately negative association with criminal behavior (Hood et al., 2009, p. 399). Drawing clear conclusions from studies conducted in Türkiye on the relationship between İslam and social deviance, including whether

such a relationship exists and, if so, its direction, appears to be difficult. To illustrate this, a few examples are provided below:

The first and most comprehensive study on crime in Türkiye, conducted by the Istanbul University Institute of Turkish Criminology, was carried out between 1946-47 through face-to-face interviews with 974 juvenile delinquents. The study found that religious children tended to commit less theft but were more likely to engage in various other offenses. There was little difference between religious and less religious children in crimes such as murder, rape, kidnapping, and “other” offenses. Overall, the data shows that while 53.2% of those with weak faith committed crimes, this rate was 46.8% for those with strong faith. This suggests that religion does have an influence on crime, but it is a weak one.

Using cross-sectional data from the World Value Survey conducted in 1990-1991. Categories identified as social deviant behaviors included buying known stolen goods, accidentally hitting a parked vehicle and failing to report the damage, and using marijuana or hashish. Ultimately, a negative (decreasing) correlation was found between buying stolen goods, failing to report damage from an accidental collision, and using marijuana or hashish as the importance of God in a person's life increased (Stark, 2001).

In the semi-open prisons of Ordu and Giresun (1986), the vast majority of those who committed crimes (73.7%) knew that the crime they committed was a sin, but they were forced to commit it, that they had no other choice (47%), that they did not think they would be held accountable for their actions because they were not in the wrong (21.8%), and that although the crime itself was a sin, they would actually receive merit because they were not in the wrong (8.61%). Those who did not consider the crime they committed to be a sin also did not believe that the crime they committed was a sin because they were not in the wrong (55%), that they did not commit a sin by doing this act but rather fulfilled justice (15%), and that they took revenge for an injustice (17.5%). Those who firmly believed in God before committing the crime (83.5%) and those who accepted that those who obeyed God's commands and did good deeds in this world would go to Paradise after death, and those who did not obey God's commands and did bad deeds would go to Hell (82%) constituted the vast majority. In addition, it was determined that 13.7% of criminals performed the five daily prayers, 22.3% performed Friday and Eid prayers, and 56.2% fasted continuously during Ramadan. It was found that those who committed crimes such as theft, robbery, rape, sodomy, and drug use had weaker faith in God, showed indifference towards religion, and while they largely did not perform religious rituals, they engaged in religiously forbidden behaviors at a high rate compared to other criminals. The findings indicate that those who committed particularly shameful crimes had low rates of faith and worship, while their rates of engaging in religiously forbidden behaviors were high. This leads the researcher to conclude that there is an inverse relationship between religious devotion and especially shameful crimes (Peker, 1990).

A significant finding of a recent study on university students is the lack of a substantial influence of religious factors on deviant behavior. The student's religiosity only had a negative effect on one deviant behavior (alcohol consumption). This seems to support the assumption (claim) in Western literature that religion is more effective in “victimless crimes.” This limited information suggests that religion influences deviant behavior both positively and negatively. In conclusion, based on the available findings, it is stated that religion has no or a very weak role in preventing deviant behavior (Özbay, 2007).

A recent study of a group of inmates in prison found that most criminals did not consider themselves religious and also exhibited negative characteristics in terms of the religiosity variables examined. This negative perception was observed more intensely in criminals who had been in and out of prison multiple times. Based on the findings of this research, the researcher shares the following opinion: It can be said that religiosity is one of the factors that prevents crime, that a large proportion of criminals consist of non-religious individuals, and therefore, religiosity can be considered as an important variable in criminality analysis. Similarly, it can be argued that as individuals' level of participation in the religious sphere or their level of religiosity increases, their likelihood of engaging in antisocial and criminal behavior decreases (Kızmaz, 2010).

A study conducted on female prisoners revealed no difference in religious beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors between female prisoners and individuals who had not committed crimes. Accordingly, when female prisoners involved in crimes were asked about their religiosity, 37.5% of participants described themselves as “very religious,” and 32.9% as “religious.” In other words, 70.4% of female prisoners categorized themselves as religious/very religious (Kenevir, 2015). In another study by the same researcher, female prisoners who defined their crime as a matter of honor did not see their actions as contradicting their religiosity. However, religion appears to be a legitimizing factor rather than a triggering factor in the crime committed (Kenevir, 2017).

Values and Religiosity

Value is something desirable, interesting, and needed. The importance of value increases according to the intensity of the desire for it. The concept of value expresses not “what has been,” but “what ought to be.” In this sense, the concept of value, which has a more practical/applied character than a theoretical one, can be said to be one of the conditions of human existence. Humans create their values as a result of the relationships they establish with other beings. Values reflect desires, wishes, and preferences; they include important concepts and ideas for the individual, thoughts or beliefs about what is right, appropriate, and desirable. In this sense, values are beliefs about whether something is desirable (good) or undesirable (bad). Values are desired goals that guide, direct, and act as rules for individuals' lives, with varying degrees of importance. Values are fundamental cultural elements that guide individuals' behavior, evaluations, and attitudes.

The concept of individual values describes ideals and the elements that an individual considers important in their life. Values influence all aspects of life and attitudes, principles, and things that

are valuable to them. Values are also integrated with individuals' worldviews and determine their priorities. Therefore, many social scientists believe that values are fundamentally important in explaining human behavior. Values are very deep psychological constructs that show individuals' preferences in critical situations and events. In this sense, values interact with many different psychological and cultural elements. These elements include attitudes, beliefs, norms, ideologies, assumptions, desires, interests, and needs. One concept that may be related to values is religion and religiosity.

A value system is formed by the values that determine how a person behaves in certain situations. For a value system to be emotionally harmonious and logically consistent, it needs a regulating, integrating source. One of the most important sources of these resources is religion. Theoretically, religion and values are quite related. Although religion cannot be reduced to a set of moral values and rules, values constitute a significant part of every religion. Interest in this relationship is increasing day by day and continues intensely today. As religion is transmitted through generations, so too is the transmission of values. Religions encourage their followers to follow certain value perspectives. Therefore, many people generally find certain value priorities in religion. Thus, religion appears as a special value domain. In this domain, a deep, comprehensive, and sacred evaluation takes place. A person who adopts this style of evaluation willingly connects with and submits to a transcendent and sacred creator and regulates their life according to His will. Therefore, a religious person acts under the influence of their religious beliefs to justify all their actions. Religion serves as a source for rules of conduct and social structure, thus ensuring the acceptance of social norms. Religion is as influential on the social environment as a powerful social movement. In this sense, religion is one of the important sources of values.

At the psychological level, values refer to the investigation of the relationship between religious commitment and religious attitudes, which we theoretically refer to as religiosity on the one hand, and the individual's personal value orientation on the other. In the long history of research on the relationship between religion and values, it has been determined that individual values are influenced by religion. Schwartz and Huisman showed that there is a theoretically significant set of commonalities between religious commitment and a set of values in some individuals belonging to four different denominations or religions: Judaism, Protestantism, Roman Catholicism, and Greek Orthodoxy (Duriez et al., 2003). In these studies, the variation of individual values according to religious groups is understood as indicating a relationship between religion and values. Research results using both previous value approaches and Schwartz's value approach regarding the religiosity-value relationship have revealed that people at different levels of religiosity are generally guided by different value orientations. Accordingly, religious people; It is observed that people support values representing conservatism, respect for authority, and adherence to social norms (Traditionalism, Conformity), and self-transcendence, manifested through concern for protecting and enhancing the well-being of close individuals (Benevolence); they place higher importance on values expressing motivation towards avoiding uncertainty; and conversely, they attribute lower

importance to values expressing motivation towards independent thought and action and the pursuit of sensual pleasure-seeking (hedonistic) desires (Stimulation, Hedonism, Self-Direction) (Duriez et al., 2003). Research conducted in our country has generally yielded results parallel to this pattern (Mehmedoğlu, 2013).

A study on the value orientations of Turkish teachers showed that religious orientation exhibited the highest positive correlation with Tradition, Conformity, and Security, while the highest negative correlation was observed with Universalism, Self-Direction, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, and Stimulation (Kağıtçıbaşı & Kuşdil, 2000).

A study examining the relationship between the political and religious preferences and life values of Turkish prospective leaders revealed that those who define themselves as “very religious” consider Benevolence, Tradition, Security, and Achievement to be more important than Hedonism and Universalism in guiding their lives. Those who position themselves between the very religious and the non-religious, however, find Power, Security, Conformity, and Tradition to be more important (Atay, 2003).

It has been found that there are significant positive correlations between religiosity and Tradition, Benevolence, and Conformity, and significant negative correlations between religiosity and Hedonism, Stimulation, Power, and Self-Direction (Mehmedoğlu, 2006). Similar results were obtained in two separate studies conducted on students of the Faculty of Theology (Mehmedoğlu, 2006/1; Kızılgeçit et al., 2015).

Pro-Social Behavior and Religiosity

Prosocial behavior can be defined as voluntary activities intentionally undertaken to help another person or group. It is the act of helping another without expecting any form of reward. In other words, it refers to behaviors (helping, donating, cooperation, volunteering, forgiveness, self-sacrifice, etc.) that a person exhibits voluntarily and without coercion, for the benefit of another person or group. Prosocial behaviors are also defined as a positive aspect of moral development and as the opposite of antisocial behaviors. Encompassing behaviors such as helping, sharing, comforting, and cooperating, prosocial behaviors are also called “altruistic behaviors.” The moral reasons for a positive social or altruistic personality can be said to include empathetic concern, the ability to see others' perspectives, and acceptability. At the core of prosocial behavior lies altruism and helping others, organizational citizenship behavior, empathy, charity, volunteering, and cooperation.

What motivates people to engage in selfish or other-oriented behavior? For example, in social situations like finding a wallet in the middle of the street, a person has two options: to act in their own self-interest by taking the wallet, or to act in the interest of others by returning the wallet to its rightful owner. In the social sciences, this first type of behavior is referred to as selfish (egoistic), and the second as prosocial behavior. As in other disciplines, social psychology may also have different terms describing the same or similar behaviors. One of these, altruism, can be defined as helping

others that involves costs not offset by any reward. Cooperation occurs when two or more individuals help each other to achieve the same goal. Because it is other-oriented rather than self-oriented or selfish, altruism represents the hidden and valuable quality of the motivation for prosocial behavior. The principles and emotions of prosocial behavior are intertwined. Structurally, prosocial behavior incorporates compassion and compassionate love. Compassionate love refers to excessively selfless tendencies (other-oriented feelings, beliefs, and behaviors) that are conscious, well-motivated, and thoughtful. Compassionate love includes (a) mercy towards those who suffer and (b) a passionate commitment to the progress of other people, and indeed all of humanity.

Religious doctrine and rituals can serve as a breeding ground for prosocial behavior. Positive social behavior is the aim of religiosity. On the other hand, almost all classical theorists (James, Freud, Skinner, Erikson, and Allport) and contemporary evolutionary scientists emphasize the positive link between religion and altruism. In recent years, a growing body of evidence has shown that religious people (instinctive religion, beliefs, and practices) perceive themselves as prosocial behaviorists. Indeed, religious people place great value on charity, justice, and care, moral principles, and also noble emotions such as empathy, compassion, and love. In fact, altruism, care, and justice—the interpersonal dimension of morality—are not the only moral concerns of religion. Religion is also concerned with rules of honor, loyalty, and dominion, imposing obligations and duties on higher institutions, society, and oneself. Morality concerning sexuality and honor is far more strongly tied to religion than to interpersonal morality. Interestingly, these prosocial behavioral traits, values, or emotional tendencies are prevalent not only among Christians (much of the work in the psychology of religion comes from there) but also among Buddhists, Jews, and Muslims. Prosocial behaviorism appears to be a key characteristic of the religious personality and one of its likely generalities. Religious people see themselves, and are seen by others, as people who, in addition to social conformity, evaluate, feel, live, and think in a way that considers the interests and needs of others. Religious people are prosocial because they empathize (i.e., tend to understand the thoughts and share the feelings of others) and/or because honesty and openness are important to them, and they respect social norms. The connection between religion and positive social behavior appears to be very closely related to the ability to empathize, to think deeply, and/or to be honest (Saroglou, 2006).

Religious people value conformity in interpersonal relationships, need social approval, and support being within the group in the face of external obstacles. Therefore, religious individuals are compelled to exhibit prosocial behavior towards relatives, acquaintances, and those with whom they have close relationships and whose judgments they value. However, research shows that this behavior is limited to within-group and familiar individuals, and not universal enough to extend to strangers who threaten religious values. Less prosocial behavior is exhibited towards strangers who have little or no chance of reciprocation. Secondly, they exhibit protective prosocial behavior in critical moments of life—but certainly not towards those who threaten their religious values, such as members of the group outside of it. Mutual assistance, solidarity, forgiveness, and other

interpersonal prosocial behaviors have been the focus of psychological research on prosocial behaviorism.

Prosocial behaviorism exists not only in the minds of religious people but also as a key component of their personality, desires, values, moral principles, and emotions. Religious prosocial behaviorism is often observed to be encouraged in relation to positive self-image, social respect, and reciprocity. In turn, religion can motivate prosocial behaviors – even subconscious ones – and foster altruism in a highly universal way (e.g., among both religious and non-religious individuals). Evidence of the existence of devotedly altruistic behaviors is found in the lives of heroes and saints, and, among other things, is encouraged for religious reasons. Different perspectives on religion are linked to varying levels of processes, both individual and collective, ranging from altruism-based kinship to developed cultural altruism. Research shows that, on average, non-believers score lower on prosocial behavior personality tendencies than believers. A significant psychological impact of altruism in a religious environment is that prosocial behavioral approaches and behaviors contribute to the good of what is effective.

Among Belgian students, religiosity was positively associated with the intention to help relatives and close friends but not entirely linked to the willingness to help unknown targets in the same situations. Similarly, among Polish students, religiosity predicted willingness to help friends in need but had no association with willingness to help unknown individuals in the same need. Another study showed that Polish religious students were willing to help an exam-passing alliance but not a feminist ally (Saroglou, 2013).

A study conducted on Imam-Hatip High School students in our country revealed that the participating students exhibited a level of prosocial behavior that was above average and could be considered high. However, the level of prosocial behavior among the students did not reach a very high value. It was found that female students had a higher level of prosocial behavior than male students. The study also determined that memorization of the Quran was another important variable affecting the prosocial behavior levels of Imam-Hatip high school students; in this context, students who had memorized the Quran had a higher level of prosocial behavior than those who had not (Çekin 2013).

It is generally accepted that empathy plays a significant role in the emotional foundation of prosocial behavior. Empathic concern refers to a person's being caring, compassionate, selfless, and above all, loving towards others. Helping behavior also appears to be largely dependent on empathizing with others. Studies investigating the relationship between empathy and religiosity, both in the West (Watson et al., 1984) and in our country (Ayten, 2010; Özcan, 2016), have generally found a positive correlation between the two. In particular, individuals with instinctive religiosity tend to have a strong inclination to understand and help others. People with high levels of religious belief and worship exhibit an altruistic orientation, aware that “sharing the suffering of others” is a religious duty. Furthermore, research on donations to charitable organizations shows that religiosity, altruism, and empathy have a positive influence on the behavior of making covert donations.

Individuals motivated by altruism try to understand the plight of those in need and act in their best interest (Tiltay & Torlak, 2015).

Forgiveness and Religiosity

Forgiveness can be defined as the ability to view the wrongdoer with compassion, kindness, and love when a transgression occurs, and to voluntarily relinquish negative behaviors such as resentment, hurt feelings, or revenge. When someone forgives a person who has wronged them, the negative feelings they previously harbored towards the offender are replaced by positive and love-based emotions (empathy, compassion, sympathy, kindness, etc.). True forgiveness is voluntary, unconditional, and an active process. This type of forgiveness can transform both the forgiver and the forgiven. Individuals have experienced forgiveness, especially when they are less motivated to flee from the offender and seek revenge, and when they spontaneously become more compassionate towards the offender.

Refusing to forgive and persisting in that refusal is a form of harboring resentment. Forgiveness doesn't involve completely forgetting the offense or acting as if it never happened. However, overcoming hatred and relinquishing the desire for revenge is essential. The perpetrator remains guilty, and the offense remains an offense. Forgiveness involves a reduction in resentment and hatred, and a shift towards positive feelings and motivation towards the offender. Ultimately, negative emotions are replaced by positive ones, and the individual develops hope for “more positive developments.

All major religions have teachings that encourage forgiveness. Religious systems view forgiveness as a moral value and instruct their followers accordingly. Instructions to this effect are found in holy books and prophetic teachings. Furthermore, they sanctify forgiveness by presenting role models for the act of forgiving (e.g., the forgiveness of Joseph's brothers, the Prophet Muhammad's forgiveness of Wahshi, the killer of his uncle) and by offering a worldview that enables individuals to interpret events and relationships in a way that facilitates forgiveness. In this context, religion is an institution that instills feelings, thoughts, and behaviors related to forgiveness in people. But at the same time, individuals' choices regarding forgiveness also lead them to reshape their religious beliefs. Psychologists, therefore, focus on the potential of forgiveness to change an individual's perspective on life as a whole.

For many people from different cultures and beliefs, forgiveness is a deeply religious concept. Issues prevalent in many religions and cultures, such as crime, mistake, sin, repentance, reconciliation, peace, salvation, and atonement, at least indirectly draw our attention to the problems of forgiveness and its place in the lives of individuals and societies. A person who asks God for forgiveness for their shortcomings believes that they are making a new beginning in their relationship with God. Similarly, when a person asks for forgiveness from someone they have hurt or forgives someone who has upset them, they create a new opportunity for the relationship to heal.

Therefore, forgiveness has emerged as an important topic in the studies of the psychology of religion in recent years.

Psychological research conducted over the past fifty years has consistently shown a positive correlation between religious commitment and the tendency to forgive others. Studies have shown that those who are highly religious, compared to those who are not, have a greater motivation to forgive, are more inclined to take individual responsibility for their wrongdoings and to make amends, make greater efforts to forgive, and are less inclined to hold grudges against those who have wronged them (McCullough et al., 2013). Accordingly, those with a high degree of intrinsic religious orientation are more inclined than those without to feel guilt for their mistakes, to confess and feel good after confession, to forgive themselves, and to believe they have been forgiven by God. It suggests that when intrinsically religious individuals harm others, instead of resorting to absolute religious solutions such as seeking forgiveness only from God, they are more inclined to use interpersonal solutions (e.g., confession, seeking forgiveness from the wronged party, etc.), and that these solutions provide more robust psychological and interpersonal benefits. Some findings from these studies have led to the following conclusions. Focusing on contemplating one's harmful behavior can lead to feelings of divine forgiveness, while reducing the likelihood of seeking forgiveness between individuals. Conversely, concentrating on how to repair the damaged relationship increases the tendency to directly ask for forgiveness from the victim.

Religion has been shown to have some beneficial effects on health and well-being because it encourages people to forgive in their relationships with friends and family. The tendency to forgive among religious people is seen as one of the mechanisms that provide them with positive health benefits. Conversely, it has been noted that persistent refusal to forgive a criminal can harm physical health, particularly increasing the risk of cardiovascular disease (McCullough et al., 2013, p. 231). A study conducted in our country revealed that with an increase in religiosity, characterized by feelings of closeness to God, referencing religious commandments in solving social problems, honesty, performing acts of worship such as fasting and prayer, reading the Quran, and possessing a level of religious knowledge, the tendency to forgive someone who has wronged them increases, with individuals "understanding them, believing they can correct their mistake, and investigating the root cause of the problem. Conversely, the tendency to seek revenge decreases, with individuals avoiding the offender, not trusting them, maintaining distance, reviewing their relationship, being dissatisfied with them, making them pay for their actions, retaliating in kind, cursing them, and wishing them harm and suffering (Ayten, 2009/2). Another study showed that general religiosity did not have a significant effect on forgiveness tendencies. However, it was found that the religious knowledge and practice/application dimensions of religiosity had a positive and significant impact on the general tendency to forgive, forgiving others, and forgiving specific situations. It has been found that there is a negative relationship between the "Utilitarian-Defensive Orientation" dimension of religiosity and general forgiveness, and that it has a significant effect on general forgiveness. In conclusion, it can be said that religiosity helps suppress feelings of hatred, revenge, and anger, can be effective in

fostering optimistic feelings towards others, and plays an important role in reducing the tendency to seek revenge and increasing the tendency to forgive (Uysal, 2015).

Work, Profession, Work Ethic, and Religiosity

Job commitment is a concept largely revealed by productivity-focused research. It summarizes an employee's respect for the service they provide, the ethical level they exhibit while doing their job, and their sense of responsibility for any potential harm arising from the results of their work. Therefore, regardless of the nature of the job, the employee's contribution to the work, personnel opinions about the job, and the service to be provided, the knowledge that the individual will maintain their duties with similar commitment are the main factors in job commitment. Maintaining a consistently high level of job commitment among public officials is extremely important for the efficiency of public services.

Many variables influence job commitment. A study conducted in our country showed the highest correlation between religiosity and job commitment. Considering variables common to all faiths, such as believing in a god, regularly attending prayers, and visiting places of worship, there is a positive relationship between religiosity and job commitment in public institutions. Accordingly, public employees with more religious feelings and behaviors will exhibit a more committed workplace performance (Şahin & Şahin, 2016).

Marketing ethics has gained importance worldwide in recent years, thanks to increasingly conscious consumers. Because the activities of the marketing department are more clearly visible to consumers than other business activities, harsh consumer criticism often stems from these activities. Therefore, businesses must prioritize marketing ethics and avoid actions that consumers might perceive as unethical. In other words, businesses must meet consumers' expectations of honesty to acquire loyal customers. Business owners are at the forefront of those who must meet these consumer expectations. Their ethical or unethical behavior serves as a guide for marketing managers and sales personnel. Academic studies on this subject show that when consumers perceive an ethical problem in any marketing action, they tend to be more inclined to buy the company and its products. It was concluded that their intentions were negatively affected.

Religiosity has been a significant variable in marketing research, particularly over the last 30 years. The Hunt - Vitell model is one of the most notable models developed in the field of marketing ethics. In this model, religiosity is among the individual factors considered to influence ethical behavior. A study conducted in Türkiye found that the level of religiosity of small business owners affected their perceived level of ethical problems, but no evidence was found that the level of religiosity affected ethical intentions. Based on this, it can be said that more religious individuals perceive higher levels of ethical problems. While a direct effect between religiosity level and ethical intentions could not be detected, an indirect effect through perceived ethical problems is possible. When the research results are evaluated, it can be said that religiosity, idealism, perceived ethical problems, and ethical intentions have a linear relationship (Özbek & Özer, 2012). A similar study

conducted on business administration students also found that the level of religiosity positively affected ethical intentions. The behavioral dimension of religiosity appears to have a positive effect on ethical intentions. This result, specific to this research, shows that more religious individuals have a lower intention to commit unethical acts, and individuals with a higher behavioral dimension of religiosity have higher levels of ethical intentions.

The findings indicate that, within the specific research sample, more religious individuals avoid actions that harm others more, refrain from intentionally harming another person, and believe that causing physical or psychological harm to another person is not right, regardless of the reason. Furthermore, this finding supports the expectation that less religious individuals would consider the morality of an action to be determined not by adherence to rules, but by the positive outcomes (Özbek & Özer, 2013).

Consumer ethics is defined as moral principles and standards that guide the behavior of individuals or groups in fulfilling their obligations regarding the use of goods and services and the disposal of their waste. The influence of religious values on consumer behavior is a known fact. Studies on consumer ethics have shown that religious values are one of the factors determining consumer ethics. Another concept that is thought to be related to consumer ethics is materialism, which is the subject of research within marketing science. The incompatibility of excessive materialistic tendencies with religious values has been debated for a long time, and research indicates a negative relationship between religious values and materialism. In a study conducted in our country on this subject, it was revealed that there are relationships between the sub-dimensions of consumer ethics and intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity. It was understood that intrinsic religiosity shows a negative relationship with actions that can be considered negative in consumer ethics, while extrinsic religiosity shows a positive relationship with such actions. According to the results of this research, it can be said that intrinsic religiosity is more decisive than extrinsic religiosity in the moral behavior patterns of consumers. Research data revealed a positive correlation between materialistic tendencies and external religious values. Individuals' perception of religious values as a means to an end, within the context of external religiosity, can play a role in terms of possession.

Religiousness influences marketing activities. Religious traditions and institutions can affect trade rules, prohibit certain products, or influence the timing and location of marketing. The factors consumers consider when choosing a brand are diverse, and sometimes consumers themselves are unaware of them. Studies have shown that the level of brand loyalty among those who identify as religious varies according to their religious teachings. Some researchers argue that religious commitment can extend to brand loyalty. One reason why religiosity is important for marketing and other social sciences is that individuals use this concept to define themselves and simultaneously form a social group with its own rules, norms, perceptions, and values. The impact of religiosity on the social value system and the influence of these values on consumer behavior are significant. Research has shown that consumers often make decisions based on their religious beliefs rather than on what will provide them with the greatest economic benefit. Numerous studies to date have

found a significant relationship between religiosity and consumer purchasing behavior. In other words, brand preference and purchasing behavior can change depending on a person's level of religiosity. Therefore, in terms of consumer behavior, the phenomenon of religiosity varies depending on the commandments, references, and products associated with that religion. A study conducted in our country also showed results consistent with these assessments. According to the participants, a significant relationship was found between the degree of religiosity and/or frequency of worship, the extent to which television advertisements influence purchasing decisions, the extent to which information about the country of origin of the brand influences purchasing decisions, and the degree to which the preferred brand is defensive (Çubukçuoğlu & Haşiloğlu, 2012).

Conclusion

One of the main elements constituting a religious system is morality. From a religious perspective, which prescribes the regulation of human behavior according to certain rules at both individual and societal levels, “religiosity” and “morality” are inseparable. There are very strong links between religiosity and morality. Individuals or societies that embrace religion perceive observing moral rules in their choices and behaviors as an internal obligation. Therefore, when the moral element is lacking or insufficient, a person's religiosity is also problematic.

However, religion and morality remain separate fields. Morality is a way of life, a system of rules that an individual must follow to do what is good and right and to avoid what is bad. When a relationship is established between these two fields, God, who is the subject of our prayers and worship in religion, emerges as the ultimate source of reference to be considered in our moral choices. In this case, our religious beliefs play an active role in our moral choices, and moral values gain a new dimension when they receive the support of an absolute and sacred authority. Thus, a religious person interprets any event they encounter not only in terms of the predictions of their individual conscience or societal expectations, but also in terms of the commands of the sacred authority they believe in and are bound to. In this way, they add “sin” to “evil” and “merit” to “good” in their life. Thus, religious and moral feelings develop together in the individual, nourishing and supporting each other.

Religion clearly sets forth right and wrong. Religious texts, traditions, and customs offer many examples of morally upright individuals that people can admire, while also containing direct rules on how people should behave in their lives. For individuals who sincerely and wholeheartedly embrace religious beliefs and values, morality and values play a significant role in their judgments, behaviors, and attitudes. Conversely, the influence of moral values weakens in those who exhibit only outward religiosity. When moving from religious belief to morality, there isn't always complete harmony between them in influencing and changing people's personalities and behaviors. Moral shortcomings are also visible results and evidence of individuals' incomplete internalization of religion.

In today's capitalist and secular order, there is no clear distinction between what is good and beneficial for the individual and what is beneficial for society. Individualism and worldliness have come to the forefront in contemporary culture. A moral understanding based on pleasure, power, and self-interest has become widespread. However, traditionally, a distinct aim of religion and morality has been to limit the desires and wants of the self, to restrain the tendencies of people to express their individual desires and wants. Findings from multifaceted research show that religion still provides moral standards for many people today. However, this role of religion as a measure and rule-setter continues with some difficulties and confusion due to these cultural changes, and its influence on consciences is gradually diminishing.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is a theoretical work and does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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Research Article

Spiritual Counseling and Guidance for the Grief Process in Palliative Care

Palyatif Bakımda Yas Sürecine Yönelik Manevi Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik

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Abstract

Palliative care is a healthcare service that aims to enhance the quality of life of patients struggling with life-threatening illnesses and their relatives by assisting in the resolution of problems in physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and other dimensions. Spiritual care is one of the fundamental components of palliative care. The aim of this study is to examine the spiritual support needs of patients and their relatives during the grief process in palliative care and to explore how the content of spiritual counseling can be structured. This study employs the “document analysis” method, one of the qualitative research methods. The majority of patients hospitalized in palliative care units are terminal-stage patients. Therefore, both patients and their relatives experience “anticipatory grief” and enter the grief process. While coping with the burdens imposed by the illness and the intense sorrow caused by the approaching end of life, the spiritual needs of patients and their relatives increase. In order to meet these needs, it is essential to assign a spiritual care specialist in palliative care who is knowledgeable about the psychological and spiritual changes experienced during the grief process. Grief is a staged process that is expected to result in the individual’s return to at least the level of equilibrium that existed prior to the loss. To meet the spiritual needs of patients and their relatives during the grieving process, spiritual counselors must first determine what these individuals’ spiritual needs are and then implement a spiritual care programme focused on the grieving process, including the period after death, for the relatives of patients. In this context, based on a literature review, four categories of spiritual counselling related to the grieving process were identified in the study. These are: ‘spiritual counselling to cope with the grieving process through faith, spiritual counselling to cope through religious practices, spiritual counselling to cope through values, and spiritual counselling to cope by providing religious social support.’ As a result of this research, it is recommended that ‘coping-based’ spiritual counselling be provided to patients and their relatives in palliative care within the scope of spiritual counselling services in hospitals. The research is expected to contribute to the literature in the fields of ‘palliative care’ and ‘hospital spiritual counselling’.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Spiritual Counseling and Guidance in Hospitals, Palliative Care, Grief Process, Patient, Patient’s Relative.

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Özet

Palyatif bakım, yaşamlarını tehdit eden hastalıklarla mücadele eden hasta ve hasta yakınına fiziksel, psikolojik, sosyal, spiritüel ve diğer boyutlardaki sorunlarının çözümünde yardımcı olacak, yaşam kalitesini artırmayı hedefleyen sağlık hizmetidir. Manevi bakım, palyatif bakımın bileşenlerinden biridir. Araştırmanın amacı, yas psikolojisi bağlamında palyatif bakımda hasta ve yakınlarının yas sürecindeki manevi destek ihtiyaçlarını incelemek ve manevi danışmanlığın içeriğinin nasıl oluşturulabileceğini araştırmaktır. Araştırmada nitel araştırma yöntemlerinden “doküman analizi” yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Palyatif bakımda yatan hastaların çoğunluğu terminal dönem hastalarıdır. Bu nedenle hastalar ve yakınları “beklentsel keder” yaşamakta olup yas sürecine girmektedir. Hem hastalığın sıkıntılarıyla başa çıkmak durumunda olduklarından hem de gelmekte olan son nedeniyle yoğun keder duygusu içindeyken hastalar ve yakınlarının manevi ihtiyaçları artmaktadır. Bu ihtiyaçları karşılamak üzere palyatif bakımda yas sürecinde yaşanan psikolojik, manevi değişimleri bilen bir manevi bakım uzmanının görevlendirilmesi bir gerekliliktir. Yas, bireyin en az kaybın öncesindeki denge durumuna dönmesiyle sonuçlanması beklenen ve evreleri olan bir süreçtir. Hastalar ve yakınlarının yas süreciyle ilgili manevi ihtiyaçlarının karşılanması için manevi danışmanlar tarafından öncelikle bu bireylerin manevi ihtiyaçlarının ne olduğunun belirlenmesine ve ardından hasta yakınları için vefat sonrasını da içine alan yas süreci odaklı bir manevi bakım programının uygulanmasına ihtiyaç duyulmaktadır. Bu bağlamda literatür analizine dayanarak araştırmada yas sürecine yönelik manevi danışmanlığa ilişkin dört kategori belirlenmiştir. Bunlar, “yas süreciyle inançla başa çıkmaya yönelik manevi danışmanlık, dini pratiklerle başa çıkmaya yönelik manevi danışmanlık, değerlerle başa çıkmaya yönelik manevi danışmanlık, dini sosyal destek sağlayarak başa çıkmaya yönelik manevi danışmanlık” tır. Bu araştırmanın sonucu olarak hastanelerde manevi danışmanlık hizmetleri kapsamında palyatif bakımda yatan hasta ve hasta yakınlarına yasa yönelik “başa çıkma temelli” bir manevi danışmanlık verilmesi önerilmektedir. Araştırmanın “palyatif bakım” ve “hastane manevi danışmanlığı” alanının literatürüne katkı sağlayacağı düşünülmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Hastanelerde Manevi Danışmanlık ve Rehberlik, Palyatif Bakım, Yas Süreci, Hasta, Hasta Yakını.

Introduction

In recent years, palliative care has gained significant importance in health services under the influence of the holistic healthcare approach. The World Health Organization defines palliative care as “an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing problems associated with life-threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification, impeccable assessment, and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial, spiritual.” (World Health Organization, 2025). Palliative care, which focuses on end-of-life care for patients who no longer have hope of recovery, aims to ensure a dignified death by improving quality of life. It is emphasized that the goal of palliative care is not to add years to life, but to add life to years (Devictor & Carnevale, 2008, p. 389). Spirituality, which is included in this definition, is one of the components of palliative care. The aim of spiritual care is not to increase people’s religiosity, but to help those who are trying to cope with what they experience under difficult hospital conditions to realize how spirituality can contribute to them and to assist them in finding relief (Ok et al., 2019, p. 163; Siddall et al., 2015, p. 52; Nelson-Becker, 2013, p. 112).

By its very nature, palliative care is a type of healthcare service in which long-term hospitalization is common. For this reason, patients and their relatives need not only medical treatment but also psycho-social-spiritual support. Moreover, spiritual support is a part of healthcare services in hospitals, yet its importance in palliative care is indisputable. Providing support to patients' relatives, as well as to patients themselves, is among the explicit goals of palliative care. Although providing spiritual support is included among the duties of healthcare personnel, they may remain inadequate in meeting this need fully, as they often lack the necessary professional training for such support. Therefore, within the scope of holistic healthcare services, the need to employ spiritual counselors in healthcare institutions to provide such support naturally emerges.

Patients in palliative care and their relatives have a need for spiritual counseling regarding the grief process. If the patient is conscious, he or she realizes that they are in the process of dying, and the thought that life is coming to an end plunges the individual into deep sorrow. Patients' relatives, on the other hand, while trying to cope with the difficulties arising from the burden of care, also experience the profound sadness of knowing that they will lose a family member with whom they share deep relationships and attachments and who has been a witness to their life story. Accompanying a loved one through the dying process may impose a heavy burden on them and expose them to intense stress. When the process is prolonged, patients' relatives may, in addition to the exhaustion associated with caregiving, be overwhelmed by feelings of helplessness due to the belief that there is nothing more they can do. As these individuals confront the reality of death, on the one hand they try to comfort and soothe their loved ones, while on the other hand their death anxiety is triggered, and together with existential questioning, the search for meaning comes to the fore once again.

One of the fields of inquiry in the psychology of religion is spiritual counseling and guidance. Hospital spiritual counseling is among the most widespread and active areas within the field of spiritual counseling. In Türkiye, spiritual counseling in hospitals is carried out within the framework of protocols signed between the Presidency of Religious Affairs (Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı) and the Ministry of Health. Spiritual counselors are selected from among religious officials working under the Presidency of Religious Affairs. However, since this is a relatively new field, there is a clear need for scientific research to be conducted. For this reason, the subject of the present study has been determined as spiritual counseling for the grief process in palliative care. In this context, the aim of the study is to investigate, within the framework of grief psychology, the spiritual support needs of patients and their relatives during the grief process in palliative care and how the content of spiritual counseling can be structured. In line with this aim, the method of the study has been determined as document analysis. Document analysis, which is a qualitative method, is based on the examination or evaluation of printed and electronic (computer-based and internet-transmitted) materials. Document analysis requires the examination and interpretation of data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge (Bowen, 2009, p. 27). The aim of the document analysis in this study is to derive meaning from some quantitative and qualitative

research conducted on the subject in the literature, in line with the purpose of the study. The research questions determined within the scope of the study are as follows:

1. What is experienced during the grief process? What is the psychology of grief like?
2. What is the function of spirituality in the grief process?
3. What are the spiritual counseling needs of patients hospitalized in palliative care units and their relatives regarding the grief process?
4. How can the content of grief-focused spiritual counseling to be provided to patients and their relatives in palliative care be structured?

The Grief Process in the Terminal Stage

The term *terminal stage* is used for situations in which it is no longer possible to treat the disease or slow its progression and patients gradually enter the dying process. Patients hospitalized in palliative care units are predominantly terminal-stage patients. During this period, patients are aware that their illness has progressed and that death is approaching. For this reason, they may grieve for both the fact that they will never recover and the imminent death. The same situation applies to patients' relatives. The concept of "anticipatory grief" has been developed to describe the pre-loss state related to a loss that has not yet occurred. In this context, individuals with parents in old age, terminal-stage cancer patients and their families, as well as patients and their relatives whose illness cannot be treated and who are therefore in the terminal stage, experience this condition (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 24). Thinking about the people they will leave behind in life and unfinished business, plans, and dreams, and bidding farewell to these, constitute some of the fundamental challenges of this period for patients. In this stage, in addition to the discomfort caused by the illness itself, patients must cope with the distress arising from their dependence on the care of others, as well as with anxiety and fears related to the moment of death. During this period, receiving psychological and spiritual support in addition to medical treatment may provide relief for the patient. Reflecting on one's own death and confronting it within one's inner world is not easy. However, talking about the fear of death in all its aspects, expressing fears and anxieties, and having others witness these feelings and thoughts can alleviate this heavy psychological burden. During this period, not only patients but also their relatives may be in need of support. In addition to the difficulties related to caregiving, the possibility of losing a loved one—who is usually a family member—the anxieties regarding how the course of the illness will proceed, and witnessing the suffering of a loved one due to the disease are all extremely exhausting for patients' relatives. On the other hand, witnessing the deterioration and death of other patients in the hospital environment may also act as a factor that further increases already existing anxieties (Kahraman Erkuş, 2021, p. 205).

Terminal-stage patients do not always consist solely of adults. Since healthcare services provided to children differ from those for adults, they are generally treated in separate units within healthcare institutions. For this reason, pediatric palliative care units have been established for terminally ill children. In most cases, parents accompany their children in these units. For parents, having a child

who is a terminal-stage patient is an extremely painful situation. After the death of his daughter Sophie, Freud (1917) stated that the death of a child before their parent is a terrible thing. It is the most difficult loss a person can be forced to grieve. With the death of a child, parents lose not only a very precious bond but also the future they had envisioned. For this reason, the grief of losing a child is so painful as to seem almost unbearable. The death of a child may disrupt the balance within the family. While family members struggle to make sense of the loss and find it difficult to express feelings of anger and guilt, the loss may either bring the family together or lead to irreparable fragmentation among them (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 99). For parents, even if the child is an adult at the time of death, the loss is still perceived as untimely. This loss confronts the parents with what feels like a meaningless task: continuing life without their child. On the other hand, an individual who has lost a spouse also loses a companion, a helper, a source of security, the mother or father of their children, their spousal identity, and their future; therefore, it is expected that they will experience the grief process in a profound and prolonged manner (Zara, 2011, p. 75; Waugh et al., 2018, p. 2).

The Psychology of Grief

The term *mourning* is defined as a broad range of psychological processes that begin with the loss of a loved person (Bowlby, 2015, p. 31). The concept of grief was first defined in psychology in Freud's article "*Mourning and Melancholia*" as a process consisting of the loss of interest in the external world and painful emotions. In this study, Freud argues that during the mourning process all psychic energy is invested in the lost person and their memories. When the individual comes to accept the loss, this energy is withdrawn. According to Freud, mourning is completed with the total withdrawal of this energy directed toward the loved object (1917, p. 254). According to psychoanalysis, the psychological pain caused by loss and the ensuing grief resemble the body's being wounded and the subsequent healing of that wound (Keser, 2021, p. 3).

There are various types of losses in life; however, death is the most concrete and observable of these (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 13). Every separation and loss gives rise to intense anxiety, helplessness, loneliness, and feelings of being lost. The anxiety that emerges after the loss is experienced together with deep sorrow and a longing to reunite with the deceased. For the bereaved individual, the desire to be reunited with the lost person can sometimes become so intense that they may even wish for their own death in order to reunite (Prigerson et al., 2009, p. 12). In this case, in order to be able to adapt to life again, grief must be experienced and completed. When grief progresses along its natural course, the individual can complete the grieving process and learn to live with the loss by making it a part of their life. In order to understand the phenomenon of grief, three fundamental elements must be understood. First, loss inevitably leads a person into sorrow. Second, every loss reactivates past losses. Third, fully grieving each loss serves as a means of growth and renewal (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 12).

Grief does not mean forgetting the one who has been lost. On the contrary, grief means that the individual accepts the loss and the emotions associated with it, copes with the difficulties brought about by the loss, and succeeds in continuing life without the deceased by acknowledging that they will not return. On the other hand, grief is not a disease but a natural reaction to loss. However, the naturalness of grief does not mean that it is an easily manageable process. Grief is a multidimensional process that concerns every area of an individual's life. At the end of this natural process, individuals restructure their lives through new bonds and relationships. Indeed, during or as a result of the grieving process, individuals may even experience growth and development (Göka, 2018, p. 151). When a person truly grieves, they may learn things about themselves and about being human that they did not know before. What the individual learns not only enables them to gain greater psychological maturity but also helps them to make peace with life. Although it is not easy to believe that a painful experience of loss contributes to human development, the individual personally experiences the reality of this (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 14).

There are differing views regarding the experience of the grief process. Early psychological theorists stated that individuals who experience loss go through the grief process with similar internal experiences and symptoms and that the process is universal. Some contemporary theorists, on the other hand, insist that each individual's grief is unique (Keser, 2021, p. 4). Certainly, due to the universal nature of the experience of grief, many people feel similar emotions while struggling with loss. Every separation and loss initiates the grieving process. Factors such as the value of what is lost for the individual and the manner of the loss determine the intensity of grief (Göka, 2018, pp. 146, 153). However, it is also accepted that the work of mourning progresses in a form that is unique to the individual. For this reason, there is no single correct formula or effective prescription for successful mourning (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 13). People's grief is as individual as their fingerprints and is shaped by their past experiences of loss and the characteristics of their relationships with those they have lost. The nature of grief is highly complex. Even within the same family, each person's sorrow may develop quite differently. The expression "psychological wound" is used to describe loss. Similar to the healing of a physical wound, the course of grief may vary depending on factors such as preparedness for the loss, the characteristics of the deceased person, the psychological resilience of the bereaved individual, and their capacity to experience sorrow. The individual's age, gender, manner of expressing emotions, and coping skills are also counted among the characteristics that influence grief reactions and the course of the grieving process (Bowlby, 2015, p. 47; Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 20).

Since the work of mourning is a process that progresses with intense feelings of sorrow, it is extremely exhausting. It is not possible to deny grief in mourning. Denial is as absurd as ignoring a broken bone (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 13). However, sorrow also has a consoling aspect. During the work of mourning, sorrow enables the continuation of the bond with the lost person (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 37). The most common and universal reaction to loss is sadness, yet mourning involves much more than sadness alone (Keser, 2021, p. 16). For example, the repetitive thinking about the

deceased person observed in bereaved individuals who are exposed to intense mental preoccupation in the face of loss also constitutes a part of grief (Keser, 2021, p. 14). While repeated reviews occur in consciousness, it becomes inevitable to confront the reality of loneliness and longing, accompanied by the feeling of being surrounded by the past (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 37). One of the most prominent effects of a loss experience is the feeling of “diminishment” and “irreparability” (Keser, 2021, p. 29). Another reaction observed in bereaved individuals is guilt. Feelings of guilt may be a reflection of anger directed at the self, or they may develop due to the thought, “They died, but I am alive.” For these individuals, guilt may become more palpable when good things happen in their lives or when they enjoy themselves (Keser, 2021, p. 20). Drawing attention to the serious similarities between grief and depression, Freud (1917, p. 244) stated that while there is no impairment in self-esteem in mourning, the other findings are the same as in melancholia (depression). The difference between the two is that in mourning the individual perceives the world as empty and impoverished, whereas in depression the individual feels themselves to be empty and impoverished (Küçükkaya, 2009, p. 10; Bildik, 2013, p. 224; Göka, 2018, p. 137).

Dreaming about the deceased is also a frequently encountered situation during the grieving process. It is suggested that especially the theme of the deceased person asking for food or drink in dreams may indicate the denial of the loss or that the farewell has not yet been completed. It is argued that dreams are a natural part of the grieving process and help to alleviate the pain of loss (Mallon, 2005, p. 43). Volkan and Zintl (2010, p. 40) state that through dreams, grieving individuals reflect their desire to keep the deceased alive, reveal various internal conflicts such as anger and bargaining, and that dreaming about the deceased is a part of grief itself. Dreams are expected during the grief process and continue with a gradual decrease in the later stages of mourning (Keser, 2021, p. 24).

Grief is not merely an emotional process in which intense distressing feelings are experienced; it is also a cognitive process that requires cognitive and behavioral adaptation to the consequences of the loss. During the grieving process, it is not sufficient to normalize only the emotions related to grief; change is also needed at the cognitive, emotional, and ideational levels. In this process, it may be necessary to reconsider pre-loss meanings and purposes and to construct new meanings. However, this effort of cognitive reappraisal and restructuring is itself a painful process. On the other hand, in addition to coping with the stress caused by the death event, there are also cognitive tasks in grief such as maintaining the bond with the deceased person (Malkinson, 2001, pp. 673–674).

Although the grieving process is a natural process, since it is quite difficult to experience and complete, time, courage, and support are needed for healing. When the grieving process is completed, it is expected that the individual will make the loss a part of their life and learn to live with it. When the loss is traumatic, completing the mourning process becomes even more important for the individual to be able to continue life in a normal and healthy way. Indeed, it is observed that those who experience traumatic loss and avoid mourning or who chronify their grief develop

physical and psychological disorders and are unable to maintain their normal life activities in a healthy manner (Zara, 2011, p. 74).

Stages of the Grief Process

Grief is a process with stages, which is expected to result in the individual's return to at least the level of equilibrium that existed prior to the loss. In early studies on grief, it was assumed that normal grief progressed in stages and in a linear manner. In other words, the prevailing view was that "grief is very painful at first, this pain decreases over time, and the individual begins to feel better." Today, however, the view that grief may be experienced in a chaotic and circular manner has gained greater acceptance (Küçükkaya, 2009, p. 10; Bildik, 2013, p. 224; Göka, 2018, p. 137). With regard to this stage, it is stated that "nothing in grief remains as it is. The individual thinks that they have moved out of a stage, yet that stage may surprisingly recur and return again and again" (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 24).

Volkan-Zintl conceptualizes mourning in two stages: the initial period and the work of mourning. The first stage is the grief experienced during the crisis period, which begins at the moment when the loss or the threat of loss (e.g., a diagnosis of a fatal illness) occurs. The body and mind resist grief; as a consequence of avoiding confrontation with death, the individual moves in and out of states such as denial, bargaining, and anger. When the painful reality is internalized, the crisis period ends and the mourning period begins. It is assumed that the grief process ends with the acceptance of death; however, on the contrary, what begins is the second stage of mourning. After the reality of death is accepted, the relationship with the deceased is reorganized, and the subtle and complex work of reconciliation required to transform the deceased into a memory begins (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 21).

Based on a study conducted with terminal-stage patients, the Swiss physician Kübler-Ross (2010, p. 48) proposed that the grief process consists of five stages. She states that the patients' first reaction is "disbelief, denial, and rejection." This is usually a temporary defense and soon turns into partial acceptance. Sometimes denial accompanies disbelief. Denial may serve as a buffer by preventing shock in the face of loss. It may initially absorb the impact of the shock and help the individual to gradually digest a harsh reality (Küçükkaya, 2009, p. 9; Göka, 2018, p. 156). Funeral rituals may function to confront the bereaved individual with reality and thus to bring denial to an end (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 25; Hökelekli, 2025, p. 115).

In the second stage, when denial can no longer be sustained, it gives way to emotions such as anger, jealousy, and resentment. Some individuals may even feel anger toward the deceased, believing that they will not be able to live without them. At times, anger may be displaced and directed toward healthcare personnel or family members. If the grieving individuals believe in God, they may also feel anger toward Him. One of the most unhealthy grief reactions is directing anger toward oneself (Kübler-Ross, 2010, p. 59; Küçükkaya, 2009, p. 9; Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 29; Hökelekli, 2025, p. 115; Keser, 2021, p. 19).

The third stage is bargaining, in which an attempt is made to negotiate with God. This stage, which carries the purpose of postponing the end, is likened to a rejected child promising to be a “good child” in order to have their wish fulfilled (Kübler-Ross, 2010, pp. 89–91; Hökelekli, 2025, pp. 115–116).

The fourth stage is depression. Numbness and anger are replaced by a profound sense of loss and sorrow. One reason why the patient experiences depressive feelings at this stage is exhaustion from what has been endured, while another is the awareness of impending departure from this world (Kübler-Ross, 2010, pp. 93–94; Hökelekli, 2025, p. 116).

The final stage is acceptance. Although this stage is not a “happy ending,” it is described as “the last rest before a long journey.” If the patient has had sufficient time or has received help for coping in the previous stages, they reach a phase in which they are no longer angry or distressed about their fate. However, emotional numbness is observed at this stage. For those who have long resisted the inevitability of death, attaining peace and tranquility and reaching the final stage is quite difficult (Kübler-Ross, 2010, pp. 119–121; Hökelekli, 2025, p. 116).

Engel (1961), who is well known for his studies on grief, defines the process as “the period until functions return to normal.” He speaks of three stages of grief: “shock and denial,” “acceptance of the loss experience in the course of time,” and “reorganization.” According to this view, although grief is accepted as a natural process that is expected to resolve spontaneously, the individual’s vital functions may return fully or nearly fully; however, insufficient recovery may also be observed. Bowlby (2015), on the other hand, states that the grief process consists of four stages. In the first stage, there is “a general state of numbness, interrupted by sudden outbursts of anger, which may last for hours or days”; in the second stage, “a prolonged search for the deceased lasting for months”; in the third stage, “disorganization, disintegration, and despair”; and in the final stage, “reorganization and the completion of grief”.

According to Göka, the grief process consists of four stages. In the first stage, “numbness and protest” are experienced, and the stage is dominated by tension, fear, and anger. The second stage is the stage of “searching for and longing for the lost person.” In this stage, the individual perceives the world as empty and meaningless, constantly thinks about the lost person, cries, and outwardly expresses their anger and restlessness. The third stage is the stage of “psychological disorganization and hopelessness.” In this stage, physical preoccupations increase, and restlessness and helplessness are felt. The fourth stage is the stage of “recovery,” in which the bereaved individual creates new purposes for their life (Göka, 2018, p. 155).

Zara states that the grief process consists of five stages. The first is the stage of “shock and numbness,” in which a brief state of numbness is experienced as a result of confronting the reality of death at the initial moment when the loss is learned. The second is “disbelief and denial,” during which the bereaved individual rejects the reality of loss for a period of time and behaves as if nothing has happened. The third is the stage of “yearning,” dominated by feelings of loneliness and anger, in which there is a wish for the lost loved one to return. The fourth is “helplessness,” in which feelings

of helplessness are experienced as the reality of loss is accepted and its consequences are understood. The fifth is the stage of “acceptance and restructuring life,” in which the reality of death/loss is now accepted, the variety and intensity of grief reactions decrease, and normal life functions return to order (Zara, 2011, pp. 79–80).

In Worden’s “Tasks of Mourning Model,” the grief process is addressed not as a process consisting of fixed stages, as in the other models, but rather as a set of fundamental tasks that the individual must accomplish in order to complete their grief. These tasks are listed as follows (Worden, 2008, pp. 39–52):

1. **To accept the reality of the loss:** This refers to the bereaved individual’s full acceptance of the fact that the deceased will not return. Although cognitive acceptance may occur in the early period, emotional acceptance is a process that takes time.
2. **To process the pain of grief and express emotions:** Accepting the pain is an essential task in the grief process. Since grief is completed through experiencing and working through the pain, the individual’s avoidance of pain or attempts to suppress or block it lead to a prolongation of the grief process. After the pain is experienced, an inner sense of relief is expected to emerge. The expression of emotions constitutes another part of the healing process. Over time, the frequency of experiencing these emotions is expected to decrease. However, special days such as death anniversaries may reawaken the pain.
3. **To adjust to a world without the deceased:** The bereaved individual must adapt to the loss of the role that the deceased played in their life and to the changes this loss has created in their sense of self. At the end of the grief process, when individuals make sense of these changes and redefine the purpose of life, they may experience personal growth.
4. **To find an enduring emotional connection with the deceased while continuing life:** Redirecting the emotional energy invested in the deceased toward other relationships and personal interests in life is described as a fundamental task to be fulfilled in this process. The bereaved individual must form a conscious memory representation of the deceased and prevent this process from negatively affecting future plans. According to Worden, the grief process is completed when the bereaved individual can think about the deceased without suffering pain. However, this does not mean completely severing all bonds with the deceased. Rather, it means placing the memories and thoughts of the deceased in an appropriate place within one’s emotional world and continuing the rest of one’s life in this way. This stage is considered the most difficult among the tasks of mourning.

Reconstructing Meaning in the Grief Process

One of the tasks that individuals must complete in order to bring the grief process to a close is adapting to life without the deceased loved one. One of the basic components of this adaptation is the reconstruction of meaning. Certain events that befall a person in life raise feelings of meaninglessness or bring the search for meaning to the forefront. Among the situations in which

questioning about meaning becomes unavoidable and impossible to postpone are the losses that individuals experience (Okay, 2021, p. 105). The death of a loved one can turn into an experience that shakes, or even destroys, a person's world of meaning. Thoughts such as "What is the point of living without him/her? My world has become utterly empty" can have a deeply unsettling impact on one's meaning world (Keser, 2021, p. 31).

With the loss, the individual's life story may begin to fade and become blurred. The world of meaning they have constructed up to that point is shaken. When the loss involves someone close, or when it is sudden, the disruption in the world of meaning is even more severe (Okay, 2021, p. 106). According to narrative approaches, people exist through their own life stories. For this story to be meaningful, there must be people who have borne witness to it from the beginning. When a loss occurs, not only a loved one is lost but also a witness to that story. Therefore, the story must be rewritten and the meaning of life reconstructed (Keser, 2021, p. 2).

The problem of meaning is a psychological process that is extremely difficult for the individual to resolve (Okay, 2021, p. 104). Confronted with meaninglessness, the individual enters an active search for meaning, triggered by existential anxieties. Meaning is personal, and each individual constructs the meaning of their own life (Okay, 2021, p. 103). Meaning can be considered of two types: cosmic/global meaning and earthly/situational meaning. Cosmic/global meaning is related to the purpose of the existence of the universe and humankind, whereas earthly/situational meaning concerns the question, "What is the purpose of *my* existence?" When there is a discrepancy between these two worlds of meaning, the problem of meaning surfaces. The feeling of meaninglessness brought about by loss is among the factors that trigger the search for meaning. The effort to resolve the incompatibility between the individual's cosmic/global meaning world and their earthly/situational meaning world constitutes an important dimension of the grief process (Okay, 2021, p. 102). Healing occurs when the bereaved reconstructs their meaning world and re-establishes harmony. This experience fulfills an important function for the individual's psychological transformation and development. By constructing meaning at the end of the grief process, the individual learns to make new plans without the person they have mourned, to reorganize identity and relationships, and to re-evaluate dreams and beliefs (Okay, 2021, pp. 108–110).

The process of reconstructing meaning after loss occurs in two ways. Either the individual brings the earthly/situational meaning derived from the event into harmony with their cosmic/global meaning world, or they reshape their cosmic/global meaning world in line with the earthly/situational meaning. This process may result in three possible outcomes: the bereaved person's meaning world may be reorganized; meaning may assume a form that is entirely different from before; or no change may occur in the meaning world. The individual who reconstructs the meaning disrupted by the loss can redefine or relearn the world and the self. The person whose meaning world has been shaken may mourn their former meaning world and begin to repair the safe haven that was destroyed together with the loss. They then reconstruct meaning and thus continue their life. For the bereaved individual, the process of reconstructing meaning is both a

farewell and a process of construction. Through the discovery of meaning, the person reorganizes their life story (Okay, 2021, pp. 108–109).

According to the “Meaning Reconstruction” model developed by Neimeyer and Anderson, this process consists of three components. By accomplishing these three grief tasks, the bereaved individual attempts to make sense of the loss and integrate it into life. These are:

1. **Making meaning:** This is the effort to understand why the death occurred. Questions such as “Why did he/she die? Why did this happen to him/her?” are signs that the process of meaning-making has begun. The answers given to these questions—such as “His/her time was up (belief in destiny)”, “He/she was ill and old”—are attempts to meet the need to make sense and to cognitively situate the loss.
2. **Finding benefit in the loss:** The second component of meaning-making is the ability to see positive aspects of the loss. Believing that the deceased did not suffer when dying, that their suffering ended with death, or that the person was released from illness at the time of death are examples of positive reappraisal. In this way, the bereaved can see a ray of hope in tragedy, draw lessons from the experience, feel stronger after the loss, develop new worldviews, and become more empathetic toward others. This change is usually recognized months or years after the loss.
3. **Identity change:** The final component of meaning reconstruction is identity change. After the loss, the individual loses a part of their identity. They may need to assume the roles previously carried by the deceased. The individual may come to view themselves as more resilient and patient, and as more positive, tolerant, and empathic in relationships. Although the deceased is no longer physically present, through the internalization of their values and memories, they continue to exist within the identity of the bereaved. This process entails an evolution from loving the person in their presence to loving them in their absence. When a loved one is lost, love takes the form of grief. Memories of the deceased are recalled from time to time, and their teachings about life continue to be applied. In this way, the deceased continues to exist in the life of the bereaved and is, in a sense, rendered immortal (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002, pp. 48–51).

Losses activate existential anxieties and confront people with their own fragility, transience, and mortality (Keser, 2021, p. 9). Through the reconstruction of meaning, the shock, sorrow, regret, depression, and intense longing experienced after the loss gradually diminish; the reality of death is accepted; and the bereaved person’s hope and desire for life are renewed. This has been described with the metaphor “being washed ashore while almost drowning” (Okay, 2021, p. 113). Grief rituals, which vary according to socio-cultural contexts, also contribute to the meaning-making of loss (Neimeyer et al., 2002, p. 237). In Turkish–Islamic culture, funeral prayers, condolence visits, expressions of sympathy, prayers recited for the deceased, *mevlid* ceremonies, and communal meals are funeral rituals that, on the one hand, help bereaved individuals construct meaning and, on the other, provide appropriate settings for receiving social support. Through the reconstruction of

meaning during the grief process, changes overlapping with post-traumatic growth may occur. An increase in the value the bereaved attaches to life after the loss, making sense of the loss within their belief system, feeling stronger and more mature as a result of struggling with pain, and placing greater value on relationships in the awareness that loved ones may be lost at any moment—all of these are signs of such growth (Gillies et al., 2014, p. 208).

For human beings, anything in life can be a potential source of meaning, and they may derive meaning from more than one source. A potential source of meaning offers a person a purpose in life, provides values that tell them how they should behave and in which direction they should move, and helps them to feel worthy. To reach the goal presented by their source of meaning, the person must make active efforts, and this in turn supports a sense of self-efficacy. In this context, religious beliefs provide a framework that explains the world in a coherent and systematic way and offer answers to existential, fundamental, and difficult questions that may be asked in life. Thus, religion becomes an important source of meaning for individuals with religious commitment (Okay, 2021, p. 121).

Meaning-oriented psychotherapy approaches are beneficial in resolving meaning crises experienced by individuals. Most meaning-oriented psychotherapy interventions are based on Viktor Frankl's (1963) logotherapy. With the development of the positive psychology movement, as the view that psychotherapies should go beyond psychological disorders and strengthen positive experiences has become widespread, interest in meaning-oriented interventions has increased. Neimeyer's intervention of "meaning reconstruction after loss" is one such example. The aim of this psychotherapy intervention, which is implemented in the form of group therapy, is to help bereaved individuals make sense of the loss and to enable them to discover their personal, relational, and spiritual sources of meaning that give them strength. It also seeks to support them in identifying the lessons that can be drawn from life after the loss and the positive aspects of the loss (Neimeyer & Anderson, 2002). However, every person and every meaning are unique; the therapist is merely a guide. The following stages may be followed in therapy:

1. **Stage:** An exercise of talking about the loss, the place of the deceased, and memories of the deceased.
2. **Stage:** An exercise in which the bereaved writes a letter to the deceased and receives a letter "from" the deceased.
3. **Stage:** The bereaved is asked to write a story using words given to them. This story does not need to be related to real life; it may be written symbolically in the form of a virtual dream. In this way, the bereaved has the opportunity to discover feelings that are not consciously available or are difficult to express verbally (Neimeyer, 2016, p. 75).

Grief and Spirituality

When confronted with the reality of death, people turn more frequently to religion and spirituality; thus they may find ways to make sense of what they are experiencing, develop

explanations for death, and gain the strength to continue living. Religion and spirituality are among the factors that help cope with the grieving process. Religion and spirituality are among the factors positively associated with acceptance of death and the individual's readaptation to life (Brady et al., 1999, p. 417; Başer, 2018, p. 92). It is particularly observed that, during the stage of making sense of the loss, the frequency of religious attributions and the use of religious coping methods increases. Religious beliefs encompass positive psychological potentials such as providing solidarity, optimism, and hope, as well as offering positive views on life after death, recommending patience, and encouraging trust and reliance (*tevekkül*) on the Creator. Göka (2018, pp. 194–195) notes that, while trying to preserve their systems of meaning, individuals may have thoughts such as “God does not burden anyone with a load they cannot bear,” “There must be a divine purpose in God allowing this event to happen to me,” and that such thoughts facilitate acceptance of the loss. The belief that “there is good in every misfortune,” although difficult, helps to understand the positive developments that the loss brings into the individual's life. Even when a person cannot find a positive explanation or meaning, their belief in God and trust in Him provide an important anchor for believing that positive outcomes may emerge. The belief that what is experienced is “part of a divine plan” and not based on coincidence is among the core tenets of some religions (Yaparel, 1994, p. 285). Thinking that nothing is in vain, that there is a reason for what is experienced, and trying to explain this reason through religious attributions can help the individual manage the grief process.

Even those who feel very little influence of religion in their daily lives enter into the sphere of religious influence when they lose a loved one or attend a funeral. Volkan and Zintl (2010, p. 25) draw attention to the fact that religious rituals such as funeral prayers and burial practices confront the individual with the reality of death and foster submission to the current situation. Funeral ceremonies are among the primary religious rituals associated with grief. When different religions are examined, it is seen that funerals are held in a religious setting and that the final duty toward the deceased is performed in a sacred place. Religious individuals generally learn from their religion how they should respond and what kind of attitude they should adopt when their loved ones die (Göka, 2018, p. 194). Post-loss religious rituals not only enable the establishment of a relationship with the deceased under the new circumstances, but also facilitate coping with sadness and longing and adapting to the loss (Kara, 2016, p. 262). It is noted that funerals have an effect that makes it easier for the relatives of the deceased to accept death. Good deeds, religious practices, and rituals performed on behalf of the deceased give the bereaved a sense of peace in feeling that they have done something good for the one who has passed away (Göka, 2018, p. 192–194). In such difficult times, individuals who draw support from religion may find consolation, inner peace, and relief. Religious beliefs, practices, and rituals may, by facilitating acceptance—the first task of grief—help individuals to experience a normal grieving process. Studies have shown that religiosity is associated with lower levels of complicated grief reactions (Maraş, 2015, pp. 45–46).

In a study examining the cultural characteristics of coping with grief conducted with 10 American and 10 Turkish women, it was found that Muslim women continued their relationship

with the deceased through religious and cultural rituals such as prayer (*dua*), reciting the Qur'an, seeing the deceased in dreams, visiting the grave, and having a *mevlid* (a religious ceremony) recited in the name of the deceased. Participants believed that these rituals constituted a form of assistance for the deceased in the hereafter. They also stated that, in both maintaining the bond with the deceased and adapting to life along with grief and grief reactions, they were influenced by the religious and cultural aspects of society (Özmen, 2014, pp. 57–58). In an experimental study involving adolescents who had experienced parental loss, in which group-based spiritual counseling using bibliotherapy techniques was provided, a significant decrease was found in the scores of the trauma-related cognitions scale in the experimental group, as well as an increase in positive religious coping and a decrease in negative religious coping (Satan et al., 2018, p. 411).

Religious beliefs do not serve the function of making people forget the loss. However, religion primarily helps to answer the existential questions that arise in the face of death. Individuals who turn to religion during this process receive their greatest support from religion in one of the fundamental tasks of grief: making sense of death, coping with loss, and discovering new meanings. On the other hand, while some individuals who turn to religion during the grief process benefit only from its compensatory and healing functions, others may also benefit from its developmental function through the aid of religious beliefs, worship, and practices. Individuals who make sense of their experiences with the help of religion may, on the one hand, evaluate painful and distressing situations as bearable events and, on the other hand, regard the grief experience as a factor that contributes to personal maturation and religious development.

Spiritual Needs of Patients and Relatives in the Grief Process in Palliative Care

Since palliative care is a unit in which end-of-life care is provided, it is assumed that patients hospitalized there and their relatives have various spiritual needs. One of the aims of spiritual care, which is regarded as a component of palliative care, is to help them meet these spiritual needs (İşbilen, 2023, p. 607). As these individuals, whose vulnerability has increased while facing the reality of death, experience more existential questioning and greater mental preoccupation with death, their level of anxiety rises and religious/spiritual needs naturally emerge. In a study by Ok and colleagues (2019, p. 161), it was found that the state anxiety levels of patients and their relatives were significantly higher than those of the control group, which consisted of hospital staff and healthy individuals. At the same time, it can be said that the foremost need of palliative care patients and their relatives, who have entered the grieving process, is the need to cope with the anticipated loss. It is noted that among the most common problems seen in patients and relatives in hospitals are grief-related sadness, fear of death, and anxiety (Moran et al., 2005, p. 255; Ok et al., 2019, p. 68). Even though the loss has not yet occurred, these individuals have entered the grief process, and therefore their need for religious/spiritual support manifests itself more clearly. According to reports from healthcare personnel, especially patients who receive a diagnosis of a life-threatening illness and terminal-stage patients question their experiences with such questions as “Why did this happen to

me?"; "My God, why did You give me this illness?" From this, it may be inferred that patients and their relatives need to find meaning in the problems they encounter through religious/spiritual references (Ok et al., 2019, p. 46).

When providing spiritual support related to the grief process, it should be kept in mind that in some cases the relatives of the patient may need more support than the patient. Since patients hospitalized in palliative care are in the terminal stage, some may not be fully conscious. On the other hand, patients' relatives constitute the group that will continue to need spiritual support after the death as well. It is stated that families of individuals with fatal illnesses need psychological support both during the course of the illness and in the subsequent grief period, since they accompany their loved ones' experiences of illness and death. Studies have shown that religion and spirituality are effective coping mechanisms for relatives, as well as for patients. Religious belief and spirituality, with their protective function, may facilitate the adaptation of patients' relatives in the face of such difficulties (Ok et al., 2019, p. 57). Relatives also need someone to be present with them and support them when their loved one is under heavy treatment conditions, when the patient dies and they enter the grieving process, and when they confront serious illness. The spiritual needs of relatives are similar to those of patients. Ok and colleagues (2019, p. 56) grouped these spiritual needs under seven headings:

1. The need to establish a relationship with the transcendent/God
2. The need to be treated positively
3. The need for hope and gratitude
4. The need to give and receive love
5. The need to review one's beliefs
6. The need for meaning
7. The need to prepare for the patient's death

In a qualitative study by Murray and colleagues (2004, p. 39) involving 149 in-depth interviews conducted with 20 terminal-stage lung patients, 20 patients with end-stage heart failure, and their informal caregivers, patients and relatives, whether they had religious beliefs or not, expressed needs related to "love, meaning, purpose, and transcendence." The study also found that spiritual issues were important for patients and caregivers. Patients and caregivers mentioned such spiritual needs as "feeling anger, fear, pain, doubt, and hopelessness; seeing life as worthless; feeling isolated and unsupported; feeling useless; experiencing a drop in self-confidence and relationship problems; feeling that they had lost control; and asking questions such as 'Where do I belong? What did I do to deserve this illness?'" In another study, it was determined that terminal-stage patients struggle with three spiritual needs: first, to have lived a meaningful life; second, to strive to die in an appropriate way; and third, to find hope for life after death (Doka, 2011, p. 105).

In a study conducted with advanced-stage cancer patients, among the spiritual needs reported were being with their family (80.2%) and praying frequently (50%). While 26% of patients reported at least one unmet spiritual need, participation in religious ceremonies (21.1%) was the most

frequently unmet spiritual need (Yıldırım et al., 2013, p. 157). In a study conducted with relatives of patients, participants stated that they were able to meet only a very small part of their own needs (97%), that they were often unable to express their grief and sorrow (85%), that they did not know how to express their emotions (78%), and that their willingness toward life decreased considerably during this period of uncertainty (81%) (Çetin, 2018, p. 56).

The possibility of death may lead people to question more deeply, and to seek meaning and forgiveness. In a study by Murray and colleagues (2004, p. 44), it was identified that patients and relatives did not generally talk about such issues with healthcare professionals, who were often very busy, and even tried to conceal their spiritual distress. The same study, which also found that these needs were not adequately expressed even within the family, concluded that the use of active listening skills such as empathy and asking questions, and creating environments in which patients and relatives can talk about their hopes and fears, may help meet these needs. Research has found that patients whose spiritual needs are taken into account in healthcare services are discharged earlier and spend less time in intensive care units (Saad-Medeiros, 2016, pp. 2–3; Ok et al., 2019, p. 66). In a study by Balboni and colleagues (2007, p. 2), it was found that patients receiving healthcare services sensitive to spiritual needs had higher quality of life and better psychological adjustment.

In a study carried out with women with breast cancer, it was concluded that spiritually oriented group therapy reduced depression, pain, and distress and increased mood, self-esteem, and social support (Corwin et al., 2012, p. 254; Ok et al., 2019, p. 75). In palliative care, if a spiritual counselor is actively involved with the problems of patients and their relatives and provides spiritual care, both their spiritual needs can be met and, in line with the understanding of holistic healthcare, their quality of life can be improved.

Spiritual Counseling for Patients and Relatives in the Grief Process in Palliative Care

In spiritual counseling services provided to patients hospitalized in palliative care and their relatives, spiritual needs related to the grief process occupy an important place. Spiritual care, which is offered to meet these needs and is regarded as part of holistic care, is a spiritual–psychological helping service that, by using all forms of intervention, aims first to identify, assess, and address patients’ and relatives’ religious and spiritual needs—such as their sense of meaning and purpose during the illness process, anxiety, self-esteem, and connection with the transcendent—and to deal with their spiritual “wounds,” to support the patient’s spiritual well-being, to contribute to physical recovery, and thus to help them feel well both physically and psychologically (Ok et al., 2019, p. 149; Doğan, 2019, p. 194).

Spiritual counseling is a voluntary service; however, studies show that the demand for this service is high. Within the scope of pastoral counseling work in New York, Handzo and colleagues (2008, pp. 42–44) conducted a study based on 30,995 visits to patients and their relatives across six religious categories (Catholic, Jewish, Islam, Protestant, Other, and None). In this study, in which they

evaluated religious/spiritual interventions, they found that a broad group—including those with no religious belief—wished to receive spiritual care.

Possible elements of spiritual counseling for patients include performing religious duties, praying, reading religious texts or books, performing acts of worship and some religious rituals together; organizing religious/spiritual activities during sacred times; answering religious questions and offering guidance when asked; assisting with repentance when requested; supporting the expression of faith (such as *shahada*, belief, etc.); supporting the patient's spiritual development; helping them fulfill religious duties; providing religious materials needed by the patient (such as a prayer rug, Qur'an, rosary, etc.); and, under the supervision of healthcare staff, including complementary practices such as relaxation training and religious music therapy (Ok et al., 2019, pp. 70–71). Since relatives go through processes similar to those of patients, spiritual support may also be offered to the families of patients in these units—if they wish—in order to help them cope with their loved one's illness and with their own pain; counseling techniques used with patients can be applied to them as well (Kelly et al., 2006, p. 779; Ok et al., 2019, p. 69).

Ok and colleagues propose that spiritual counseling be carried out in two stages: a general pre-intervention assessment and the intervention itself. In the first stage, by using a “spirituality assessment tool,” information is obtained—on the basis of voluntary responses—not only about whether patients wish to receive spiritual counseling, but also about their desires, needs, hopes, spiritual resources, and spiritual distress. In the second stage, an intervention program can be developed in light of the results of this form (Ok et al., 2019, pp. 77–79). It will support the achievement of the aims of counseling if the spiritual counselor acquires information about the personality of the patient or relative to be supported, any existing psychological problems, living conditions, and past experiences that may affect their current situation, and determines the content of spiritual care accordingly. In addition, it is important, in terms of professional competence, that the counselor who will provide spiritual care possess, beyond basic skills such as listening and giving appropriate responses, caregiving qualities such as showing compassion, interest, and attention.

Spiritual counseling skills are listed as follows: “talking with the patient or relative, holding their hand, laughing and crying together, being present when the patient wishes, arranging for an appropriate spiritual care provider if unable to be present for some reason, listening to life stories, offering a safe environment for the expression of anger, guilt, hurt, regret, and fears, encouraging acceptance of these emotions, and avoiding potentially invalidating expressions such as ‘This is God's decree, everything will be fine, you shouldn't think like that.’” If requested, spiritual care may also include bibliotherapy, the measured use of humor and encouraging cheerfulness, prayer, worship, and the use of appropriate music, as well as encouraging preparation for the funeral, listening to the patient's last wishes, and acting as an intermediary in the realization of appropriate wishes—these are all among the supports that may be provided in spiritual care for terminal-stage patients and their relatives (McAfee et al., 2006, p. 20; Ok et al., 2019, p. 78).

One of the spiritual problems of terminal-stage patients is the thought that they are a burden to those who provide their care. This situation, which leads patients to feel guilty, not only negatively affects their psychological state but may sometimes cause them to conceal or postpone their needs (Kahraman Erkuş, 2021, p. 207). Since caregiving is difficult and exhausting, some relatives who become worn out during this process may express complaints, and patients, when they perceive this, may feel discomfort. In order to prevent patients from feeling guilty about receiving care, this problem can be addressed in a spiritual counseling session that involves the relative as well. The spiritual counselor can inform the relative, support them by explaining the spiritual value of what they are doing, and speak appropriately with the patient to help resolve the issue. Moreover, helping patients and relatives become aware of and express their emotions can strengthen their perception of receiving spiritual support (Ok et al., 2019, pp. 85–86; Handzo, 2008, p. 51).

In end-of-life services such as palliative care, spiritual needs may be felt more intensely. Allowing patients and their relatives to benefit from spiritual counseling services despite differences in their forms of belief, and providing appropriate spiritual care, are directly related to the spiritual counselor's competencies. In one study it was found that the rate of spiritual interventions given to non-religious patients was comparable to the rate of interventions given to religious patients. Therefore, the need for spiritual care should not be viewed as a need exclusive to the religious (Ok et al., 2019, p. 87; Handzo, 2008, p. 50).

Working with patients and relatives in the terminal-stage grief process and providing them with healthcare services may, by reminding healthcare personnel of their own mortality, lead them to experience death anxiety (Ok et al., 2019, p. 58). Even if healthcare staff are not themselves in a grief process, because they frequently encounter the deaths of others and witness grief processes, they may repeatedly feel the need to re-evaluate their own deaths and to question the meaning of their lives anew. Consequently, it may be necessary to include personnel working in palliative care and intensive care units in spiritual care programs conducted by spiritual counselors (McAfee et al., 2006, p. 19). In a study where hospital staff were asked whether patients needed spiritual care, it was found that those who held generally positive attitudes toward spirituality also had a favorable view of both the current and the ideal forms of spiritual care. Furthermore, the study showed that, regardless of whether their attitudes toward spirituality were positive or negative, hospital staff agreed that spiritual care is a need. It was also generally accepted that, among patient groups, those in oncology and palliative care units require more spiritual care. The possibility that hospital staff themselves may need spiritual care was also highlighted among the issues raised in this research (Ok et al., 2019, p. 162).

Spiritual Counseling for the Relatives of Patients in the Post-Death Grief Process

After death has occurred, grief counseling needs to be provided to the relatives of the deceased patient. Spiritual care services for mourning relatives of patients who have passed away may include: talking about the loss; encouraging visits to the grave; helping them express emotions such as anger,

guilt, and helplessness; assisting them in adapting to life without the deceased; supporting them in emotionally locating the deceased and holding on to life through memories; helping them view sorrow and grief as normal experiences; informing them that there may be individual differences in experiencing pain; ensuring continuity in spiritual care support; evaluating the effectiveness of coping methods; and, when necessary, referring them to mental health professionals (Ok et al., 2019, p. 71). From the very beginning, the spiritual counselor can accompany the relatives, conveying the message that they are present and sharing their pain. While the spiritual counselor is not responsible for performing religious funeral rituals, they may, if the relatives so wish, recite prayers or read the Qur'an during the grief process in order to support them.

Post-death spiritual counseling should be shaped according to the needs of the bereaved. For instance, in cases where a loved one has undergone a long illness, has no hope of recovery, and is thought to have suffered greatly, relatives may experience a sense of relief when that person dies. Thoughts such as "His/her suffering has ended; he/she is freed" may contribute to this relief, as may the sudden cessation of the intense anxiety relatives felt for the patient. However, after this feeling of relief, bereaved individuals may experience guilt (Keser, 2021, p. 33). The spiritual counselor can support the bereaved by explaining that feeling relief in such circumstances is among the normal grief reactions and by helping them not to blame themselves for it.

In our country, funeral rituals such as the funeral prayer and burial procedures are generally conducted by male relatives. Female relatives of the deceased typically do not take part in this process, assuming that it is a task specific to men. This is a practice determined by tradition rather than by any religious rule. Based on the knowledge that funeral rituals can assist in the acceptance of the loss during the grief process, it can be said that women should not be excluded from this process, that their participation in the funeral prayer, and even, where possible, their witnessing stages such as burial, would be beneficial for their grief processes. Indeed, women who lack knowledge on this subject may even think that participating in these rituals would be sinful. If they wish, the spiritual counselor can inform the relatives of the deceased that they may participate in funeral rituals.

Faith-Based Spiritual Counseling for Coping With Grief in Palliative Care

a. Spiritual Counseling Aimed at Coping With Grief Through Faith

In struggling with the difficulties of life, people seek support from their beliefs. When they encounter situations beyond their strength and feel helpless, they turn to God, activating their belief in His power. At this point, not only the strength of the individual's faith but also their image of God shapes the way this turning occurs. For the patient and relative who are confronted with the reality of death and the task of coping with grief, belief in God may be a factor that increases endurance. Belief in God is strengthened when it is nourished by feelings such as love, respect, and trust. Trust is the most fundamental emotion in faith. Religious individuals who possess a strong sense of trust toward the One in whom they believe and who have strong attachment are more

inclined to make positive evaluations when they feel the need to make sense of what befalls them, whereas those whose dominating emotion is fear may be more inclined toward negative evaluations. Those with a strong sense of trust feel more intensely the Creator's compassion, mercy, and forgiveness toward them, while those whose trust is weak may think that the Creator does not love them, does not respond to their prayers, and may interpret what happens to them as a punishment. At this point, it is a highly important spiritual intervention for the spiritual counselor to step in and guide the counselee from negative religious coping toward positive religious coping. Indeed, numerous studies have shown that negative religious coping is associated with adverse psychological indicators.

Modern grief research shows that people's continuing to maintain a bond with the deceased and to feel in contact with them contributes to their well-being. Here, beliefs of religions concerning the afterlife are of particular significance. Belief that death is not an end, that the deceased are not annihilated but continue their existence in another dimension, enables bereaved individuals to sustain their relationship with the deceased. Another positive effect of belief in the hereafter is its role in reducing anxiety about death. For example, bereaved parents may believe that their children are waiting for them in Paradise and long for this reunion. It is observed that those who lose a child, on the one hand, increase in wisdom during this difficult process and, on the other, change in a positive direction spiritually and existentially. In addition, beliefs such as the idea that the deceased child will protect the parents from Hell or intercede for them and be a means for their entrance into Paradise are among the thoughts that provide spiritual relief for bereaved Muslim parents (Doka, 2011, p. 105; Başer, 2018, pp. 95, 97).

Religious individuals who draw support from faith in the process of meaning-making may interpret the loss in terms of destiny (*kader*), think that the deceased has gone to Paradise and that God has taken them to Himself, that if the deceased suffered for a long time, death was a release for them, and that they are now in a good place and have found peace. However, although rarely, there are also examples of bereaved individuals displaying negative attitudes toward religious thoughts and practices. An individual who experiences loss may cling more tightly to their beliefs, but they may also distance themselves from their faith, question their belief in God, and reassess their religious convictions (Göka, 2018, p. 172; Okay, 2021, p. 115). The spiritual counselor must be prepared for such reactions. Indeed, the anger experienced during the grief process may sometimes be directed toward religion and God. Spiritual counseling, which is provided upon the request of the patient and relative, already includes interventions aimed at individuals experiencing such crises of faith.

Among the topics of spiritual counseling for dying patients is helping them resolve doubts that may arise in connection with the difficulties they are experiencing and supporting them in maintaining steadfastness in faith (Ok et al., 2019, p. 86; Handzo, 2008, p. 53). Some individuals with religious belief may, during the grief process, use negative religious coping instruments such as "feeling anger toward God, complaining to Him, thinking their prayers are not accepted, and

believing that God no longer cares about them,” and may distance themselves from their religion (Ok et al., 2019, p. 73). Spiritual counseling in this context can help resolve the crisis of faith being experienced.

For patients hospitalized in palliative care and their relatives, anxiety about the approaching end is a major problem that deeply shakes them. The activation of death anxiety, resulting from confrontation with the phenomenon of death, has the potential to affect not only patients and relatives but also the staff providing services in palliative care, including spiritual counselors. On the other hand, confronting death is one of the critical times that leads individuals to turn rapidly toward religion. Whether a person personally faces the danger of death or experiences an event such as the death of a loved one, death confronts the individual with a reality of life that cannot be altered, where human will has no function and control is impossible. In fact, the experience of death is a kind of experience of truth, and this truth is painful.

However, the spiritual counselor, who possesses religious knowledge and resources to alleviate patients' anxieties about the moment of death and what follows, can provide spiritual support at this point. Talking about death—often avoided and treated as a taboo topic—with patients and their relatives may itself be a form of spiritual support. Generally, people tend to deny death by not speaking about it, even when the likelihood is very high. Since not talking about it prevents patients and relatives from moving from the denial stage to the stage of acceptance, the grief process cannot properly begin and is effectively frozen. Yet grief is a process, and one cannot speak of completing a process that has never begun. The spiritual counselor can empathize with them, allow them to share their feelings and thoughts about death, and, through active listening, help alleviate their anxiety.

Rather than using phrases such as “This is God’s decree, what can we do; this world is a place of trial,” it may be more helpful to emphasize the reality of death, that death is not annihilation but a transition to another dimension, God’s love and mercy toward His servants, and the belief that reunion will occur in another realm. By drawing on cultural elements as well as religious/spiritual sources, it is possible, in the face of such a painful situation, to activate belief in the hereafter and destiny at the cognitive level and thus harness the power of faith. Since the basic source of death anxiety is uncertainty, even if this conversation does not completely eliminate uncertainties about the moment of death and its aftermath for patients, or about the loss of a loved one for relatives, the very act of being able to speak about death may have a cathartic and relieving effect.

b. Spiritual Counseling for Coping with Grief Through Religious Practices

In a study conducted with hospitalized patients and their relatives, it was found that patients used positive religious coping at a higher level than their relatives, whereas hospital staff used negative religious coping more frequently than both patients and their relatives (Ok et al., 2019, p. 162). Religious practices may also function as positive religious coping tools. In this context, prayer is one of the most fundamental instruments of spiritual counseling, and numerous studies provide ample evidence of the positive effects of prayer in difficult times of life. Research has shown that

most patients who request spiritual care consider prayer to be important (Ok et al., 2019, p. 77). Among the spiritual needs of palliative care patients and their relatives is also the need for prayer. Prayers performed together may alleviate the anxiety of these individuals, whose anxiety levels are high.

The spiritual counselor's offering a special prayer for the patient and relatives, or informing them that he/she will pray for them, and healthcare personnel such as physicians and nurses praying for the patient's healing and ease at the encouragement of the spiritual counselor, may also reveal the positive effects of intercessory prayer. If the patient and relatives so wish, performing a prayer of repentance together with the spiritual counselor may not only meet a spiritual need such as forgiveness, but also relieve them from the oppressive burden of guilt feelings. In certain health-related situations and special interventions, prayer is used as an effective coping tool in spiritual counseling. Very often, especially before surgery or at the stage of entering the dying process, prayer becomes the method most frequently used by counselors in providing spiritual support. Although the conditions of patients and relatives differ, one of the most common requests they jointly express from the spiritual counselor is prayer (Handzo et al., 2008, p. 46; Ok et al., 2019, p. 85).

Reading from the sacred text and discussing it are also among the religious rituals that may psychologically comfort patients and their relatives. When the Qur'an is read by the spiritual counselor in a beautiful voice and melody, while reminding them that it is a source of healing, and when its meaning is also read and explained, this may activate both the emotional and cognitive dimensions of faith and contribute to psychological well-being. Special-day and night programs in which palliative care staff may also participate can provide opportunities for meeting spiritual needs and offering spiritual support through religious practices by means of group spiritual counseling.

c. Spiritual Counseling for Coping with Grief Through Values

Values such as patience, gratitude, forgiveness, hope, and love may help individuals in the grief process to cope. In this context, the love shown by the spiritual counselor to the patient and relatives may help establish a relationship based on trust and also meet a spiritual-psychological need (Temiz, 2017, p. 346). The religious/spiritual value of patience in the face of difficulties may be recalled by the spiritual counselor, and it may be emphasized that being patient in such difficult times—when it is truly hard—is itself a virtue. By clarifying the difference between patience and mere endurance and emphasizing the importance of patience being shown voluntarily rather than compulsorily, the counselor may underscore its moral worth. By also referring to research findings showing that psychological well-being increases when patience is practiced in this way, patients and relatives may be encouraged to include patience among their coping tools.

Since hope is a virtue that enhances patience, instilling hope in patients and their relatives may increase their well-being, even though there may be situations that appear hopeless. Even for patients who have reached the terminal stage, physicians may say, "One should never lose hope in God," and it is often observed that relatives search for a miraculous medicine. This is because, even

if the situation is critical, the experience of loss is never a completely prepared-for or timely one (Keser, 2021, p. 6). In such patients, hope may persist. While at first this hope may take the form of hope for recovery, for not suffering, or for the discovery of a new treatment, later it may transform into hope for prolongation of life or for a peaceful death (Kahraman Erkuş, 2021, p. 207). Religious individuals, believing that their illness is in divine hands, may always feel that there is hope for a miraculous intervention. Furthermore, they may value life as a higher good than the potential harms of aggressive attempts to sustain it (Balboni et al., 2007, p. 6).

The critical point here is that unrealistic hope should not be given to the patient—for example by saying “You will get better”—and, on the other hand, if the patient or relatives already have unrealistic hope, that hope should not be taken away from them either. Sometimes clinging to even a very small hope may make them feel better. Gratitude, on the other hand, has the potential to transform negative emotions into positive ones and is therefore among the coping tools that may have a positive effect during the grief process. However, rather than offering evaluative statements such as “Be grateful that your situation is like this,” it will be a more effective approach for the spiritual counselor to use practices such as a gratitude journal so that individuals themselves may become aware of their reasons for gratitude.

The need to forgive and to be forgiven is also among the spiritual needs felt during the grief process. The spiritual counselor may emphasize the importance of putting this value into practice by speaking about the psychological benefits of forgiveness for the person who forgives. If patients or relatives feel guilt because of a wrongdoing toward someone, they may be encouraged to seek forgiveness (*helallik*) from that person so as to relieve themselves of the intense pressure of guilt. In spiritual counseling sessions, some practical exercises may be carried out to meet the needs for forgiveness and being forgiven. Consistent with cultural practices of reconciliation, appropriate settings may be created for patients and relatives. Especially since the patient’s feeling of being a burden to the caregiver is a significant source of distress, the explicit expression by the relative that they forgive the patient may be soothing and relieving for the patient. In spiritual counseling, including examples of coping with the grief process through values and making references to the virtuous conduct of prophets and religious figures in the face of hardship may help patients and their relatives to incorporate values into their coping tools.

d. Spiritual Counseling for Coping with Grief Through Social Support

One of the most important tools for coping with the grief process is social support. In palliative care, one of the most important forms of support that the spiritual counselor provides to patients and their relatives is regular visitation. Compared with other hospital units, palliative care units involve longer periods of hospitalization. While relatives who serve as caregivers may occasionally leave the hospital environment, patients generally cannot do so. Therefore, patient visits carry a much greater meaning for them than for other patient groups. Visits conducted by the spiritual counselor sometimes alone and sometimes together with other spiritual counselors, social workers,

or psychologists may ensure the continuity of both religious/spiritual and social support during the grief process for patients and their relatives.

In order to increase social support, the spiritual counselor may also meet with friends, neighbors, and relatives whom the patient and relatives would enjoy seeing and encourage them to visit. Especially the positive relationships of the patient's relatives with their social environment may help alleviate the pain of possible negative developments related to the patient. When patients in palliative care are forced to remain isolated due to their illness, the problem of loneliness may also emerge. Since hospital conditions restrict visitation, the hospital spiritual counselor's freedom to visit may contribute to meeting the socialization needs of palliative care patients and their relatives. The spiritual counselor, to some extent, also fulfills people's need to talk. Talking about illness is one of the important strategies for coping with it. Even if physicians talk sufficiently with their patients, patients often complain that they cannot talk freely with their doctors. However, speaking about illness is a need for both patients and their relatives. Finding even a small ray of hope may become possible through talking (Ağılkaya, 2017, p. 358).

For this reason, one of the greatest psychological supports that can be provided to a patient is to give them the opportunity to express the problems, contradictions, and losses they are experiencing. Feelings of hope, helplessness, fear, and anxiety may be difficult even to notice, let alone to share. Listening while patients express these is not easy either. In most cases, patients are instead tried to be comforted and calmed (Kahraman Erkuş, 2021, p. 208). When the spiritual counselor explains that denial, splitting, bargaining, guilt, and anger are natural in the grief process, that the work of mourning is both distressing and disruptive to inner balance, and that normal grief may sometimes take on a seemingly strange form, the bereaved individual may feel relieved. Moreover, by removing taboos around talking about death and by providing environments appropriate for the expression of feelings, the spiritual counselor may encourage patients and their relatives to speak and make them feel that they are not alone in this process. Serving the families of those with terminal illnesses, taking an active role in rituals such as funeral prayer and burial, and being sensitive to the need of bereaved individuals to express their pain and anger are also among the possible responsibilities associated with the spiritual counselor (Volkan-Zintl, 2019, p. 115).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In recent years, palliative care has gained significant importance in healthcare services due to the influence of the holistic healthcare approach. The aim of palliative care, which provides healthcare services to patients who no longer have hope for recovery, is not only to offer comfort-oriented medical care but also to enhance the quality of life of patients and their relatives by supporting them psychologically, socially, and spiritually. When patients and their relatives become aware of the approaching end, in addition to the distress caused by the illness, patients may experience various psychological and spiritual difficulties due to the prospect of losing their lives, and relatives due to the prospect of losing a loved one. Although death has not yet occurred, these individuals already

experience the psychology of grief. When people confront the reality of death, their orientation toward religion and spirituality increases.

Individuals in the grief process are able to make sense of their experiences through religion and spirituality, offer explanations for death, cope with grief-related problems, and gain the strength to continue living. Research shows that religion and spirituality are highly effective in coping with the grief process. It is particularly observed that the frequency of making religious attributions and resorting to religious coping methods increases during the stages of making sense of the loss and reconstructing the meaning of life. Since religious beliefs include positive psychological potentials such as solidarity, optimism, hope, gratitude, offering positive views on the afterlife, perceiving positive aspects within adversity, encouraging patience, and trusting and relying on the Creator, they may serve as an important source of spiritual support for bereaved individuals.

In spiritual counseling provided to patients and their relatives in palliative care, needs related to the grief process come to the fore. Fear of death and the need for meaning constitute the primary spiritual needs in this process. The spiritual counselor may provide spiritual care by centering these needs and integrating them with general spiritual counseling interventions directed toward patients and their relatives. However, first of all, the religious and spiritual needs of patients and relatives—such as their sense of meaning and purpose, stress, anxiety, self-acceptance, forgiveness, hope, and connection with the Creator—need to be identified. In addition, it should not be forgotten that the spiritual needs of patients and relatives in the grief process in palliative care may differ in an individual-specific manner. Taking individual differences into consideration while providing spiritual counseling will positively affect the success of the counseling process.

In this study, it is recommended that grief-oriented, coping-based spiritual counseling be provided to patients and their relatives hospitalized in palliative care. One of these is “spiritual counseling aimed at coping with grief through faith.” For patients and their relatives who are confronted with the task of grief, “belief in God, belief in the afterlife, and belief in destiny (qadar)” may serve as coping resources. With the love, respect, and trust they feel toward God, religious individuals may make positive evaluations when they feel the need to make sense of what they experience. However, some patients and relatives receiving spiritual counseling may also hold thoughts such as that the Creator does not love them, does not respond to their prayers, or that what has happened to them is a punishment. At this point, it is an important spiritual intervention for the spiritual counselor to step in and guide the counselee from negative religious coping toward positive religious coping. Through belief in the afterlife, the idea that death is not an end, that the deceased are not annihilated but continue their existence in another dimension, may enable them to maintain their bond with the deceased, reduce their anxiety about death, and preserve their hope for reunion. When supported by belief in destiny, they may think that the deceased has gone to Paradise and that God has taken them to His side; if the deceased suffered for a long time, they may interpret death as a deliverance, as the person now being in a better place and at peace. In this way,

patients and their relatives may cope with their grief through their beliefs and experience psychological relief.

Religious practices may also have positive effects on patients and their relatives during the grief process in palliative care. Prayer, which is one of the foremost positive religious coping tools, is among the most fundamental instruments of spiritual counseling. Research has shown that most patients who request spiritual care consider prayer to be important. Religious practices such as reading from the sacred text and engaging in religious activities on sacred times, special days, and nights are also among the coping tools that may provide spiritual support to patients and their relatives during the grief process.

Values have the potential to spiritually support individuals in coping with the difficulties of grief. In this context, values such as patience, gratitude, forgiveness, hope, and love may serve as effective coping tools in spiritual counseling for the grief process. Openly demonstrating love to patients and their relatives may help spiritual counselors establish trust-based relationships with their counselees. The spiritual counselor may remind them of the religious/spiritual value of patience in the face of hardship and of gratitude, which has the potential to transform negative emotions into positive ones. The value of hope needs to be incorporated into spiritual counseling interventions with great care. A spiritual counselor may encounter patients who, despite being in the terminal stage, believe that a new medication will be discovered and that they will recover, or relatives who entertain strong hope for the patient's recovery. In such cases, it is important that hope be framed in ways that provide positive spiritual support for patients and relatives—such as hope for the acceptance of prayers, freedom from suffering, and forgiveness. The need for forgiveness and being forgiven is also among the spiritual needs in the grief process. Offering patients and relatives hope that they will be forgiven, speaking about the psychological benefits of forgiveness for the individual, and emphasizing the value the Creator places on forgiveness may encourage these individuals toward forgiveness and allow the positive effects of the value of forgiveness to be incorporated into the grief process.

In difficult periods of life, human beings need social support even more. Both being a patient hospitalized in palliative care and being a relative who provides care are extremely demanding roles. Patients and relatives in palliative care are often isolated and experience loneliness. Since patients' opportunities to leave the hospital are almost nonexistent, patient visits are of great value to them. Providing social support to these individuals through regular visits by the spiritual counselor, learning which friends, neighbors, and relatives they would like to see and encouraging such visits, constitutes an important spiritual counseling intervention for coping with the grief process.

Within the context of this study, the following recommendations may be made regarding spiritual counseling services provided in our country. Hospital-based spiritual counseling is one of the most widespread fields of spiritual counseling in Turkey. Under current conditions, hospital spiritual counseling is provided four days a week and during working hours. When assessed under these conditions, it is evident that the spiritual counselor working in palliative care is not always accessible. When crisis moments do not coincide with the days and hours on which spiritual

counseling is provided, patients and their relatives naturally cannot benefit from this service at the times when they need it most. Since palliative care is a continuous healthcare service, assigning spiritual counselors—if necessary with appropriate compensation—on a shift basis, like other healthcare personnel, and thus ensuring continuity of service, may both increase interest in the service and enhance its effectiveness.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is a theoretical work and does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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Research Article

Authoritarianism in Sufi Spirituality

Sufi Maneviyatında Otoriteriyenizm

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Abstract

Spirituality is one of the most important issues in modern religious life. One can even argue that it has become an alternative to religion, because institutionalized forms of religion can lose their significance in the life of the believer, but one's religiousness or spirituality may remain. Spirituality or religiousness is a quite natural part of our individuality, while the quality of institutionalized spirituality is accidental. Although spirituality tells us something about our authentic self, in its institutionalized form our authentic self is often victimized by hierarchical principles promulgated by spiritual authorities and religious institutions. We can no longer say this is 'my spirituality', because these religious institutions impose their own particular form of spirituality upon us. The purpose of this paper is to show the victimization process that is often imposed upon our authentic self by hierarchical principles, especially as it relates to the institutionalized form of Sufi spirituality.

Keywords: Islam, Spirituality, Sufism, Shaikh, Murid.

Özet

Maneviyat, modern dini hayatın en temel meseleleri arasında yer almaktadır. Dinin kurumsal biçimlerinin bireyin yaşamındaki anlamını yitirebildiği, buna karşın dindarlığın ya da maneviyatın varlığını koruduğu göz önüne alındığında, maneviyatın dine bir alternatif olarak konumlandırıldığı dahi ileri sürülebilir. Maneviyat ya da dindarlık, bireyselliğimizin son derece doğal bir unsuru olarak değerlendirilirken kurumsal maneviyatın niteliği büyük ölçüde tesadüfi bir görünüm arz etmektedir. Maneviyatın özgün benliğe ilişkin ipuçları barındırdığı kabul edilmekle birlikte, kurumsal biçimiyle ele alındığında özgün benliğin, manevi otoriteler ve dini kurumlar tarafından belirlenen hiyerarşik ilkeler aracılığıyla sistematik bir mağduriyet sürecine tabi kılındığı görülmektedir. Dini kurumların kendine özgü maneviyat anlayışını bireyler üzerine dayatması nedeniyle "bu benim maneviyatım" ifadesinin kullanımı giderek olanaksız bir hal almaktadır. Bu çalışmada, söz konusu hiyerarşik ilkelerin özgün benlik üzerinde uyguladığı mağduriyet süreci, kurumsal Sufi maneviyatı bağlamında ele alınmakta ve incelenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İslam, Maneviyat, Tasavvuf, Şeyh, Mürit.

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Introduction

To many men and women, one of the most important questions of the day, is the place of spirituality in their modern lives. One might rightfully ask, 'What is the place of spirituality in my life? Why should spirituality matter to us? Does spirituality occupy an important enough place in our individual and corporate life? Is the present crisis in the world today linked to men/women's spiritual deprivation?' It is one of the ironies of the modern age in which we live, that while there are many attacks upon organized religion per se, there is a great support for spirituality. While some people view organized religion as a repository for cold, strict, boring principles and practices, they in turn perceive spirituality as a warm, sweet, free and natural province of human experience. This phenomenon, peculiar in many respects to our time, can be considered as different states of the human condition, and as human life marches on, so the state of humankind spirituality continues.

Because of the increasing significance of spirituality, religion sometimes loses its privileged position as the representative form of a person's whole religious life. This is especially true, when new forms of spirituality usurp more traditional forms of religion. Wulf argues that the emergence of spirituality as a new alternative to religion is a new phenomenon in the religious history of humankind (Wulf, 1997, pp. 5-7). The noun religion, and even the adjective religious, have declined in use in recent years, but the terms spiritual and spirituality have gained in popularity. Spirituality is no longer considered merely a dimension of religion, but has taken on the aspect of a whole religion in and of itself. The reasons behind this irresistible attraction for spirituality lies in its basic qualities, which are considered to be more personal, independent, open, and embracing in nature than organized religion. We could easily say that spirituality is an essential human quality, if it were not for the fact that humans cannot exist without spirituality. However, modern men and women have begun to re-explore the spiritual dimension in their lives, often with a fresh eye on its distinctively human characteristic. Voznesensky, the Soviet poet, eloquently expresses the natural tendency of humans to yearn for spirituality, when he states: "The future computers will theoretically be able to do everything that man is doing, except two things; to be spiritual and to write poetry (cited in Begovic, 1984, p. 19)".

If spirituality is a natural dimension of being human, then just what is spirituality? The answer is simple, because like all religious concepts, there is no one standard definition for spirituality, but rather it might be considered as a matter of taste. So we can say that some people define spirituality according to their taste. The word spirituality comes from the Latin noun *spiritus*, meaning breath, which comes from *spirare*, to blow or breathe. In the Latin translation of the New Testament, the word *spiritualis*, or spiritual person, refers to one whose life is ordered or influenced by the Holy Spirit or by God (Prince, 1983, pp. 127-141). Sometimes the term spirituality is used as an antonym for materiality; a label for our inner life; denoting the interior dimension of our devotion, or sometimes it is used when referring to some form of mysticism. William Stringfellow describes various understandings of spirituality as follows:

"Spirituality may indicate stoic attitudes, occult phenomenon, the practice of so-called mind control, yoga discipline, escapist fantasies, interior journeys, an appreciation of eastern

religions, multifarious pious exercises, superstitious imaginations, intensive journals, dynamic muscle tension, assorted dietary regiments, meditation, jogging cults, monastic rigors, mortification of the flesh, wilderness sojourns, political resistance, contemplation, silence, the efforts of prayer, obedience, generosity, exhibiting stigmata, entering solitude, or, I suppose, among these and many other things, squatting on top of a pillar (Stringfellow, 1984, p. 19)."

As we have just seen different meanings can be given to the term spirituality, but almost everyone agrees that spirituality is something very special and functional in our lives. Because of its vitality, the absence of spirituality in our lives is usually described by the word crisis. Koestler even goes so far as describing the present condition of our time as "the spiritual ice age" (cited in Guinness, 1973, p. 318). Men and women often place too much significance on spirituality, because they think that spirituality metaphorically represents an experience of deification for humanity. In other words, in this experience we express our desire in becoming more human, as well as more divine. Because of our unique understanding of spirituality, whenever we replace the noun form of spirituality, with that of the adjective, it takes on a new and more powerful meaning. In our daily lives we constantly hear the various adjective uses of the term spirituality. The adjective form of spirituality is transformed into new and more powerful forms, especially when it is coupled with contemporary nouns in our literature such as, 'spiritual dimension', 'spiritual issue', 'spiritual evolution', 'spiritual journey', 'spiritual emptiness', 'spiritual crisis', 'spiritual life', 'spiritual healing', 'spiritual purification', 'spiritual values', 'spiritual nature', 'spiritual discipline', 'spiritual discourse', 'spiritual truth', 'spiritual perspective', and so on (Wulf, 1997, p. 6).

By making spirituality an adjective, the intent is to make it express something more personal, something with greater depth, something that belongs entirely to us and is specifically created and developed by us. Because of the unique and individual character of spirituality, we come to identify it with our state of morality, happiness, joy, dreams, as well as with the transcendent-human dimension that accompanies it. Spirituality is the deep ground of individual being, which affects and governs human life.

Although spirituality is essentially a very personal matter, some people believe that it is also a very serious matter, which cannot be left in the hands of ordinary individuals. Thus, certain spiritual authorities seek to be the guardians of spirituality on our behalf. In order to facilitate this process they establish religious institutions, adopt certain religious principles, and produce a ruling spiritual class for the sake of our spiritual guidance and safety. As a result of institutionalization, our spirituality no longer becomes our own individual experience, but rather becomes the property of spiritual institutions, where it is held in safe-keeping by professional spiritual engineers. Many of these spiritual institutions do not simply want to introduce us to their own particular forms of spirituality, but aim to reconstitute our entire spiritual personality. The institutionalization of our spirituality is a process of experiential degeneration, which in turn constitutes a very real threat to our natural state of spirituality, such as, various restrictions on our spiritual freedom, becoming a member of a spiritually closed world-view, coercively encouraging the practice of artificial spiritual

techniques, mandating that we follow the instructions of institutional authorities, losing our zeal and taste for life, and so on.

In this paper I would like to problematize the relationship between authoritarian spiritual leaders, namely shaikhs, and ordinary individuals. By doing so, the intent is to contrast the authoritarianism of shaikhs, on the one hand, with the victimization of ordinary individuals on the other. However, before doing this, two questions must be addressed. The first question we might want to ask is, 'What is our personal motivation for problematizing the Shaikh-murid (disciple) relationship?' Let me answer this question in this way: I was born in the southeast part of Turkey. In this region Sufi shaikhs and religious institutions are not only considered spiritual centers, but are considered as political, social and economic power centers as well. Sufi shaikhs and religious orders have used and abused the issue of spirituality, solely for the purpose and expansion of their power base. In other words, spirituality has become a magnetic tool used for the purpose of acquiring more land, more political influence, greater economic wealth, and greater prestige and powerful social roles. The spiritual position of Sufi shaikhs and religious orders give them an incredible amount of power over large segments of the population. The result is that the shaikh is not so much a spiritual person, as a feudal lord, and the religious order that he belongs to is not so much a spiritual institution, as a feudal castle. In this region of Turkey, feudalism and organized religion have become intertwined with each other. For this reason, I have coined the phrase 'spiritual feudalism', which attempts to describe this phenomenon. This term not only describes a regional phenomenon for me, but also serves to symbolize the authoritarianism of its spiritual master, as well as the victimization of its ordinary individuals. The second question that I would pose is, 'Why do people choose the institutionalized form of spirituality, as it is represented in Sufism?' Although it is a well-known fact that every spiritually minded Muslim is not a Sufi, Sufism historically represents a major form of Muslim spirituality. In the history of Islam, philosophy and theology have never become institutionalized, while Islamic Law (Shari'a) and Sufism have become institutionalized. Jurists and Sufis have maintained a substantial amount of credibility and authority among the Muslim community, largely through legalistic and Sufi institutions, such as madrasa and tariqa. While Jurists generally control the practical aspects of a Muslim's daily life, the Sufi shaikhs control the spiritual aspects.

Can we critically problematize the allegedly spiritual lives of Sufis? According to Sufis, their spiritual experience is quite internalized and mysterious, therefore, it is very difficult for them to understand and conceptualize their own spiritual experience. They maintain that they should not be asked or questioned about the validity of their own spiritual experience. Al-Ghazali, a great Muslim scholar, expresses this idea by quoting the following Sufi poem:

What I experience, I shall not try to describe.

Call me happy, but ask me no more.

There has happened to me what has happened, I shall not speak,

Think of the good and ask me not for account of it. (cited in Shafaq, 1954-55, p. 47)

One could argue that the idea expressed in this Sufi poem means that there are some matters, like a spiritual-mystical experience, that we can know about in an intuitive or experiential sense, but that they are beyond our powers of rational-intellectual thought to understand and explain. It seems to me that the spiritual side of Sufism means more than this. In my view, they want to close every intellectual door that would naturally open their religious system up to criticism and questioning, which they perceive as a threat to their spiritual power, position, religious institution, and its principles. In other words, they tell outsiders to shut their mouths, close their eyes, and to follow blindly their instructions. They accuse anyone who would criticize or question their spiritual authority of being shallow-minded and ignorant. They state that such a person does not fully understand the mysteries of spiritual life, and that they are to be considered an anti-spiritual aggressor. If we are not freely allowed to criticize or question a particular form of spirituality, or the accounts given to us about the Sufis spiritual experience, then how can we place any value on their spirituality? The present author does not claim to be a very spiritual person, nor an anti-spiritual person, and although I think spirituality is something quite important, I doubt whether spiritual institutions, like Sufi religious orders, are safe spiritual heaven for many individuals. Although such thinking might be construed as skepticism, I think that every individual should have the right to freely criticize and problematize every aspect of spirituality, and no form of spirituality should have a privileged position that is above reproach or critical analysis or reflection, including Sufism.

There are three things that constitute an organized spiritual experience in Sufism: the Shaikh (the spiritual master), the murid (the disciple), and the tariqa (the religious order). However, everything generally revolves around the Shaikh in Sufi orders. Without him, there is no Sufism. ‘Abd al-Qadir al-Gilani (d.1166), the founder of the Qadri order, states that, “The order is the Shaikh and the Shaikh is the order (cited in Danner, 1976, p. 29).” Although there is no divine authority behind the spirituality of Sufi shaikhs, they make themselves out to be spiritual masters, or rather their followers do. In other words, their spiritual authority is a self-stylized form of mastership. Their personalities are mythological constructions, because they present themselves as people who have been enlightened by God, who fully practice religious ritual, and who understand the deep mysteries of religious and spiritual life (Burkle, 1982, p. 35).

As a result of such mythological thinking, to become a follower of any Sufi shaikh is not so much a matter of choice, as a mandatory duty, because living without the guidance of the shaikh is tantamount to living with Satan. The following Sufi principle extrapolates the authority of Sufi shaikhs in more definite terms: “One who has not spiritual guide (shaikh), has the devil (Satan) for a spiritual guide (Renard, 1996, p. 253).” The antithesis of God in Islam is Satan, and every Muslim is called upon to escape the snares and temptations of Satan and follow the way of God. Sufis being well aware of this dilemma, cleverly devised the above principle, so that by doing so the Sufi shaikhs place themselves on the side of God, and whoever does not follow their spiritual instructions, finds

themselves squarely on the side of Satan. In other words, they present the question of obedience to their spiritual authority, as a question of either following God or following Satan.

Although shaikhs are represented as spiritual masters, symbols of spiritual perfection, persons who hold the keys to all spiritual mysteries, being the closest friends to God, and so forth; by contrast, murids are portrayed in negative and derogatory terms. If anyone becomes a disciple in a Sufi order, he/she is considered a child, immature and ignorant, one who does not know the spiritual way of the order. He/she is looked upon as a foreigner in the order, much as a barbarian is looked upon from one who lives in a civilized community. So a murid is perceived as one who needs to be taught, educated, disciplined, and properly instructed by the shaikh, so that he/she may obtain a higher spiritual level. The essential attitude in the Sufi experience is that the murid must absolutely surrender and be obedient to the power and authority of the shaikh. The chief virtue on the part of the murid is his/her willingness to surrender his/her will to the will of another, whilst his/her capital sin would be to live a life of disobedience to the will of his/her spiritual master (the shaikh). Junayd al-Baghdadi (d.910), a prominent Sufi, describes the authoritarian relationship that exists between the Shaikh and murid by saying that the murid must be in the hands of his/her shaikh as “a dead body is in the hands of its washer” (*perinde accadaver*) (Rahman, 1979, p. 137). Because ordinary individuals are called upon to give absolute obedience to shaikhs, spirituality is no longer a free individual experience, but rather a militaristic spiritual exercise. Under this spiritual militarist regime, the murid must obey unconditionally what the shaikh orders him/her to do, and try to avoid what he forbids him to do, otherwise, he/she will fail (Ibn ‘Ata Allah, 1996, p. 94). Because of the militaristic character of Sufi spirituality, the relationship between shaikh and murid is not an I/Thou relationship, but rather a commander/soldier relationship.

The murid not only has to accept the authority of his/her shaikh, but he/she has to internalize it. There is no place for the concept of privacy in his/her spiritual walk, because every aspect of his/her life is under the control of his/her master. There are some principles that aim to hide and justify this invasion of privacy into the life of the follower, by his/her Sufi master. *Himmah* and *rabita* are two of the main requirements of Sufi spirituality. The principle of *Himmah* requires that a murid must ask with all his/her heart for the help of his/her master. The term *rabita* means that the murid must spiritually connect himself/herself with his/her master until the master becomes his constant companion. Ibn ‘Ata Allah, one of the key figures in the Shadhili order, goes even further by saying that a murid must remember his/her master under every circumstance, even in his/her dreams (Ibn ‘Ata Allah, 1996, p. 100).

In Sufism, the concept of annihilation (*fana*) is essential. The annihilation of the flesh when approaching God (*fana fi’llah*) and the annihilation of self-love when embracing God’s love (*fana fi’isk*), represents the most perfect spiritual level. Sufi orders stipulate two more forms of annihilation for a disciple: the annihilation of one’s self before one’s master (*fan fi’shaikh*), and the annihilation of worldly pleasures when entering the religious order (*fana fi’tariqa*). These two forms

of annihilation aim at ensuring the absolute and constant dependency of religious followers to their spiritual masters, and the institutions that they build.

The mind of the average murid is full of many mythological stories that center around the personality of the shaikh. Many charismatic events are orchestrated in the Sufi order to make the master appear different, mysterious, more privileged, and more holy than the average believer. Charismatic phenomena, or *karamat*, are accepted by Sufi disciples as signs, which prove their master's close relationship with God. Most murid never questions the veracity of these stories, for to do so would be anathema. The average murid has difficulty believing that his/her master is a normal human being like himself/herself; instead he/she prefers to see his/her master as a divine or semi-divine person. He/she views his/her master's life in the same light as that of God. The mythological transformation of the personality of the master makes the murid feel that he/she is not dependent on an ordinary human being, but rather a spiritually divine master.

Sufism creates a spiritual illusion centered in the authoritarianism of the master and the religious institution, which he/she belongs. This spiritual illusion is largely based on pious clichés, such as the love of God, the remembrance of God (*dhikr*), the perfect man (*insan-i kamil*), the development of one's self, from the quilt-ridden self, to the tranquilized self, and spiritual peace. These are valid and very important concepts, but they lose their significance because they become trivialized through over use, but still help to empower the status of the master. If a murid wants to love God, he/she first has to love his/her shaikh, and he/she must not forget to invoke God in any other way, than that which his/her master has taught him/her. Thus, the ideal or perfect man is considered to be the master, and the spiritual development of the disciple must be controlled by him, from beginning to end. In the light of my own limited observation, the Sufi spiritual experience is illusory, but a very strong illusion, which still has the power to govern people's lives.

It is obvious that Sufism expects people to be followers of a shaikh, in the same way that they are called to be servants of God. If we ask, 'Who is God?', then the reply may be for some, Sufism, which under-girds the shaikh/murid relationship. Sufism does not openly state, but it implies that the shaikh is on a level with deity. One of the results of the deification of the shaikh is that the murid will never be fully free or independent of him/her, even if he/she obtains a high level of spiritual perfection, in such a case the shaikh would still remain his/her spiritual savior and guide. The spiritual geography of individuals quickly becomes the spiritual colony of the shaikh, which is the fruit of corrupted Sufi principles and religious organizations. It is important to argue that Sufi religious orders are successful when they let the shaikh have a place in our spiritual geography, but once the shaikh occupies this territory he often fails to liberate it. The liberation of spiritual life from the authoritarian shaikhs is perhaps, if not the most important problem, certainly it is one of the central problems facing the spirituality of Muslims today.

The authoritarianism so closely associated with spiritual masters is the result of an authoritarian understanding of spirituality, because peoples' understanding of spirituality derives from the instructions they receive from Sufism. They do not perceive spirituality as a free and individualistic

way of looking at life from a totally new perspective, one that enriches our understanding of life, and makes us realize our greatest potential.

The shaikh is considered to be the creator of spiritual experience in Sufism, while individual followers become victims of the religious system. The would-be disciple assumes a totally receptive role, their religious experience is not creative or spontaneous, but imitative and conformist. They begin to lose their ability to make independent decisions concerning everyday life issues, for instance, in such matters as who they will marry or having a political choice. Shaikhs, as masters, are at the center of religious life, while individual followers are consigned to the periphery. They feel happy and comfortable, because they believe that their spiritual masters, and the institutions which they represent, will provide them with all of the answers to their spiritual questions, and thus satisfy their spiritual hunger. But they pay a heavy price for this pseudo-happiness and comfort. For they sacrifice their spiritual freedom for the sake of their masters.

The following question is always central in my mind: 'How can we be spiritually independent without being dependent on spiritual institutions and their masters, such as Sufi religious orders and their masters?' Frankly, I do not know how people can keep their spiritual independence, because it is up to each individual to find his or her way of doing it. But, there is a vital reason for maintaining one's spiritual independence. They must remain spiritually independent if they are to remain spiritually free. Whatever has been said about spirituality, has been said by man. In other words, it is a human construction, including Sufism. The human individual must not relinquish his or her spirituality to any institution, but rather he or she must betray all institutions and authority for the sake of his or her spiritual freedom. It is important to bear in mind however, that spirituality is not a fixed state, but rather a dynamic and creative phenomenon. In order to be spiritually creative and spontaneous, it is often necessary to reconstruct or deconstruct past spiritual pathways. For example, a careful conceptual critique of all spiritual concepts is inevitable before a creative spiritual vision can be achieved. Reconstruction and deconstruction must be perceived as a real spiritual activity, rather than blindly acquiescing to spiritual institutions. One could object that this idea does not bring us anywhere, because the road seems to go nowhere. Of course, the constant spiritual reconstruction and deconstruction process does not lead us to the doorstep of spiritual institutions, such as Sufi tariqas, nor does it make us follow in the footsteps of the Sufi masters. But it will lead us to our own authentic spiritual self, who is creatively building our own form of spirituality, and striving against spiritual authoritarianism and conformism. The authentic spiritual self is no longer a victim of spiritual institutions and authorities, but he/she is the creator of his/her own spirituality. This creative type does not receive any instructions from anyone, but freely builds his or her life without any boundaries and authorities, because he or she believes that the greatest spiritual sin is an unlived life.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is a theoretical work and does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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Research Article

From Performative Religiosity to Religious Maturity: A Conceptual Framework and Typology

Gösterişçi Dindarlıktan Dinî Olgunluğa: Kavramsal Çerçeve ve Tipoloji

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Abstract

This article reinterprets the Qur'anic concept of shirk (associating partners with God) through the lenses of psychology and sociology of religion. While the traditional meaning of mushrik denotes one who believes in multiple deities, the study employs the term analytically to describe a religious identity that fails to fully internalize the principle of tawhîd. The main axis of the analysis is the typological distinction between performative, externally oriented religiosity and the religiosity of the mature believer, a framework developed in Çinici's (2019) thesis. These two types reflect the contrast between extrinsic religiosity, shaped by social validation, and intrinsic religiosity, grounded in spiritual internalization. The article first defines shirk from theological and psychosocial perspectives and then outlines the key features of each believer type. Their implications at the personal and collective levels are explored under the subtopics of symbolism and anthropomorphism, with supporting examples drawn from contemporary literature in the psychology and sociology of religion. The study situates shirk not only in its Qur'anic context but also within contemporary theoretical paradigms of religious maturity, extrinsic-intrinsic faith orientation, and symbolic representation. In conclusion, the paper emphasizes that the distinction between performative religiosity and religious maturity is essential for understanding both individual spiritual fulfillment and broader social cohesion.

Keywords: Psychology of Religion, Religious Typology, Intrinsic Religiosity, Anthropomorphism, Symbolic Cognition.

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Özet

Bu makale, Kur'an'daki şirk (Allah'a ortak koşma) kavramını din psikolojisi ve din sosyolojisi merceğiyle yeniden yorumlamaktadır. Müşrikin geleneksel anlamı birden çok tanrıya inanan kişiyi ifade ederken, çalışmada bu kavram, tevhit ilkesini tam olarak içselleştirememiş bir dinî kimliği tanımlamak için analitik düzeyde kullanılmaktadır. Analizin ana eksenini, gösterişe dayalı dışsal dindarlık ile olgun dindarlık arasındaki tipolojik ayrımı oluşturmaktadır; bu çerçevede, Çinici'nin (2019) tezinde geliştirilmiştir. Bu iki tip, toplumsal onayla şekillenen dışsal dindarlık ile manevi içselleştirmeye dayanan içsel dindarlık arasındaki karşıtlığı yansıtmaktadır. Makale, şirki önce teolojik ve psikososyal açılardan tanımlamakta, ardından her bir dindar tipinin temel özelliklerini ortaya koymaktadır. Bu tiplerin bireysel ve toplumsal düzeydeki yansımaları, sembolizm ve antropomorfizm alt başlıkları altında, din psikolojisi ve din sosyolojisindeki güncel literatürden destekleyici örneklerle incelenmektedir. Çalışma, şirk olgusunu yalnızca Kur'an'daki bağlamıyla değil, aynı zamanda dinî olgunluk, dışsal-içsel inanç yönelimi ve sembolik temsil gibi çağdaş kuramsal paradigmlar içinde de konumlandırmaktadır. Sonuç olarak, makalede gösterişçi dindarlık ile dinî olgunluk arasındaki ayrımın hem bireysel manevi tatmini hem de daha geniş toplumsal uyumu anlamak açısından temel önem taşıdığı vurgulanmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Psikolojisi, Dinî Tipoloji, İçsel Dindarlık, Antropomorfizm, Sembolik Biliş.

Introduction

In the Qur'an, shirk is defined as associating partners with God. It is explicitly condemned as the gravest of all sins: "Indeed, God does not forgive association with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills" (Qur'an 4:48). Classical Islamic exegesis distinguishes between major shirk (al-shirk al-akbar) and the more subtle minor shirk (al-shirk al-asghar). For example, engaging in religious rituals for the sake of social recognition rather than divine approval is classified as hidden shirk (al-shirk al-khafi) and is closely tied to *riyā'*—the act of showing off one's religiosity to impress others (Çinici, 2019). In this article, this *riyā'*-driven, externally oriented mode of religiosity is referred to as *performative religiosity*.

From a psychosocial standpoint, an individual may identify as a believer yet exhibit behaviors and intentions aligned with shirk-oriented religiosity. This individual can be characterized as a polytheistic believer, or müşrik dindar, who outwardly practices the faith but inwardly remains driven by egoistic or social motives. In contrast, the mature believer (olgun dindar) transcends such motivations, embodying a theocentric worldview and integrating faith into a coherent moral lifestyle grounded in transcendental values (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Conceptually, shirk extends beyond explicit idol worship and, within the Qur'anic discourse, also encompasses the misattribution of qualities to God that compromise divine transcendence or justice. Classical Islamic sources caution against representations that reduce the divine to human-like limitations or distort the intended meaning of revelation. In this broader sense, hidden shirk is often associated with *riyā'*, wherein religious acts are oriented toward human recognition rather than divine sincerity. Prophetic traditions warn that such practices may coexist with outward religiosity while undermining inner integrity. Within this psychosocial framework, the polytheistic believer may sacralize the self or collective identity, implicitly conflating social authority with sacred

legitimacy. By contrast, the mature believer seeks to align conduct with the principles of divine unity and transcendence, emphasizing humility and ethical responsibility toward creation.

Hence, mature religiosity can be understood as a spiritual disposition that prioritizes universal ethical principles over worldly inclinations, embodying the Qur'anic imperative to worship God in sincerity and unity.

1. Materials and Methods

This study adopts a conceptual-theoretical approach, systematically reviewing and interpreting primary religious texts and scholarly literature. In accordance with qualitative literature review conventions, key sources from Islamic theology, psychology of religion, and comparative religion were selected and synthesized. The Qur'an and its classical commentaries constitute the primary theological corpus. For example, Qur'anic passages on shirk (e.g., 4:48) were examined to identify defining attributes of idolatry and divine unity. Secondary sources include contemporary works in the psychology and sociology of religion. Major concepts such as Allport's intrinsic vs. extrinsic orientation (Allport & Ross, 1967) and Fowler's stages of faith (Fowler, 1981) provide interpretive lenses. Studies of symbolic cognition and anthropomorphism (e.g., Barrett, 2004) and classic sociological theories (Durkheim, 1915; Geertz, 1973) were also consulted to understand how belief is shaped by cultural meaning. Comparative theological materials (e.g., discussions of the Trinity in Christianity and Jewish monotheism) were reviewed to situate the Islamic typology in broader doctrinal contexts. The analytical framework is a typological construction of religious identity. Inspired by Weber's use of "ideal types," the two categories, polytheistic believer and mature believer, were defined as conceptual poles for analysis. These ideal-types were characterized by features drawn from the literature: in this tradition, intrinsic orientation is treated as a mature form of religious sentiment that functions as a "master motive" in life, whereas extrinsic orientation reflects an immature faith serving self-interests (Allport, 1950; Allport & Ross, 1967). Guided by this typology, the literature was coded thematically. Primary texts (Qur'anic verses and hadiths) were interpreted hermeneutically to extract implicit indicators of each believer type (e.g., evidence of sincerity or ostentation). Secondary sources were analyzed comparatively: passages in psychology and sociology that describe extrinsic religiosity, symbolic representation, or anthropomorphic imagery were identified and mapped onto the typology. Throughout, an interdisciplinary hermeneutic method was used. In practice, this meant iterative reading and synthesis: theological texts were examined for their conceptual implications (e.g., definitions of shirk in classical tafsirs), while findings from psychology of religion (Barrett, 2004; Pargament, 1997) were interpreted in light of Islamic norms. The resulting interpretation is therefore a literature-based conceptual analysis. In line with best practices for narrative review, the goal was to build a comprehensive theoretical background and to highlight novel insights by integrating multiple fields. By juxtaposing Qur'anic teaching with modern theory, the study illuminates how each believer type is consistently characterized across sources.

2. Results

2.1. Typology Construction: The Polytheistic Believer and the Mature Believer

In contemporary psychology of religion, the development of religious faith is often analyzed through the lens of intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation, as introduced by Allport and Ross (1967). Individuals with an extrinsic orientation approach religion as a means to achieve personal goals—such as status, social security, or dominance. By contrast, those with an intrinsic orientation internalize religious teachings as the central motivational framework of their life. Their belief system is not instrumental, but existential; it is not something they use, but something they are.

Within this framework, what is termed the polytheistic believer (*müşrik dindar*) should not be understood as a distinct belief category defined by the number of deities affirmed, but as a theological expression of extrinsically oriented religiosity. In this sense, *shirk* is not treated here as a doctrinal position but as a psychosocial orientation in which religious practices are instrumentalized for social recognition, moral positioning, or group affiliation. Acts of worship performed primarily for public visibility rather than internalized conviction correspond to what Islamic theology describes as hidden *shirk* (*al-shirk al-khafī*), commonly associated with *riyāʿ*. Accordingly, externally driven religiosity already encompasses this orientation; the term *müşrik dindar* is employed analytically to emphasize the implicit sacralization of ego, status, or social identity rather than to denote a separate theological belief system (Allport & Ross, 1967).

In contrast, the mature believer (*olgun dindar*) reflects a typology grounded in universal values. This believer has transcended the literalism of early doctrinal beliefs, integrating their faith with a broader ethical worldview. As Allport notes, such individuals "live their religion"—faith becomes an end in itself rather than a means to another end (Allport, 1950, p. 71). The mature believer experiences happiness not because they appear religious, but because their faith forms the source of existential meaning and moral coherence.

This distinction is not confined to Islam alone. Traces of both types can be observed across religious traditions: mature believers are often those who have cultivated inner discipline, whereas polytheistic believers continue to struggle with ego and social expectations. As such, the proposed typology provides a novel and dynamic framework for understanding the psychology of belief through both internal and sociocultural dimensions (Pargament, 1997).

2.2. Individual Implications of Polytheistic and Mature Belief Types

The polytheistic believer often experiences a form of spiritual dissonance, characterized by a lack of inner fulfillment, heightened anxiety, and an underlying sense of moral duality. In modern societies, individuals who appear "successful" in external, sociocultural terms may nonetheless struggle with an internal void. They may feel emotionally detached or perceive life as meaningless, despite conforming to religious expectations and social norms. Çinici (2019) refers to such individuals as religiously conflicted believers—those whose professed beliefs do not align with their emotional and existential realities.

Allport's empirical findings support this view: believers who adopt religion for extrinsic purposes such as prestige, safety, or social conformity tend to display higher levels of prejudice and trait anxiety (Allport & Ross, 1967; Baker & Gorsuch, 1982). These individuals rarely question their beliefs in depth, instead relying on superficial religious assurances to ease their inner tension. This avoidance of introspection often exacerbates their emotional disconnection.

Cognitively, polytheistic believers may find it difficult to conceptualize the transcendence of God. They might attribute human-like limitations to the divine—imagining God as angry, vengeful, or partial. This is a clear expression of anthropomorphic cognition, a phenomenon in which the divine is perceived through the lens of human limitations (Barrett, 2004; Heiphetz et al., 2016). Such distorted theological representations intensify inner conflict and hinder spiritual maturity.

In contrast, the mature believer embodies an internalized faith that fosters emotional wholeness and existential meaning. From a psychological standpoint, this condition reflects meaning-making—the process by which faith becomes the central interpretive lens through which life's events are understood (Pargament, 1997). Mature believers meet Allport's criteria for intrinsic religiosity: religion is not just part of their life—it becomes life itself (Allport, 1950).

These individuals resolve the tension between surrendering control to divine authority and asserting personal agency by developing internal coherence. They align themselves with social norms not out of fear or reward, but because their moral compass is grounded in love, justice, and spiritual integrity. Consequently, their psychological health stems not from external validation but from the integration of belief, behavior, and identity. Unlike the polytheistic believer, the mature believer cultivates psychological flexibility, allowing for a spiritually resilient and ethically coherent life.

2.3. Social Implications of Religious Typologies

In the sociology of religion, religion is commonly regarded as a cohesive force that integrates the individual into the collective. Émile Durkheim famously conceptualized religion as the embodiment of collective conscience, where rituals and symbols express and reinforce communal identity. According to Durkheim, the sacred is not merely a supernatural entity—it is the society itself, symbolically projected onto totemic objects (Durkheim, 1915). Through rituals, the divine becomes the visible body of a community's moral unity.

However, in communities dominated by polytheistic believers, religion may no longer serve a unifying function. Instead, it can devolve into a site of conflict, power struggle, or institutional dominance. Religious structures that are meant to facilitate spiritual growth become tools of social control, instrumentalized for personal gain or ideological enforcement. In such contexts, literalist interpretations of faith often foster legalism, intolerance, and a rigidity that clashes with the pluralistic dynamics of modern societies.

By contrast, communities composed of mature believers emphasize the ethical essence of religion—particularly its messages of peace, compassion, and justice. As Bronisław Malinowski

argued, religion can strengthen social cohesion and provide emotional and structural support during times of uncertainty (Malinowski, 1982). In mature religious environments, values such as empathy, tolerance, and altruism are prioritized, and communal solidarity is reinforced through acts of sharing and mutual care.

In societies where polytheistic religiosity prevails, hidden shirk (*riyāʿ*) is often amplified by social dynamics. As Prophet Muhammad warned, performing acts of worship for the gaze of others amounts to a subtle form of idolatry—not because the ritual is insincere, but because it seeks human approval over divine sincerity (Muslim, *Kitāb al-Zuhd*, no. 2985). In such communities, religiosity becomes a competitive performance, a vehicle for social stratification and symbolic dominance. Conversely, the mature believer operates from moral conscience, not from a desire for external validation.

At the collective level, polytheistic religiosity tends to reproduce hierarchical and ego-centered social relations. Mature religiosity, by contrast, cultivates a public ethic rooted in collective well-being and mutual respect. Victor Turner’s theory of ritual and liminality provides further insight: rituals function as thresholds of transformation, creating moments of unity and shared experience (Turner, 1969). Mature religious communities enhance these liminal spaces by fostering inclusion rather than exclusion.

2.4. The Symbolic Dimension of Religious Expression

Religion, as Clifford Geertz famously argued, functions as a cultural system of symbols that conveys meaning, instills emotional motivation, and presents metaphysical concepts as if they were tangible realities (Geertz, 1973). According to Geertz, religion is “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations... by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with an aura of factuality” (Geertz, 1973, p. 90). In this sense, religious symbols do not merely represent doctrine—they construct a world.

From an analytical standpoint, what is traditionally referred to as shirk may be approached as a form of symbolic displacement rather than as a doctrinal judgment. In this reading, when symbolic elements—such as objects, legal structures, or institutional authorities—are treated as ultimate sources of meaning, the symbol ceases to function as a referential marker and instead acquires intrinsic significance. Drawing on Durkheim’s theory of religion, such symbols can be understood as collective representations that embody a group’s shared moral and social values. In certain religious contexts, these representations may become reified, leading individuals to relate to symbols as if they possessed inherent sacred power. From a psychosocial perspective, this process does not necessarily imply conscious theological intent, but reflects the broader human tendency to concretize abstract meanings. The analytical concern, therefore, lies not in the symbols themselves, but in the loss of reflexive distance between symbolic representation and transcendent reference.

In contrast, the mature believer recognizes religious symbols as ethical and cosmological reminders, not divine in themselves but reflective of transcendent realities. For example, in Islam, the act of prostration (*sujūd*) symbolizes submission before divine majesty. For the mature believer, this is not an act of servitude to a material object but a ritual affirmation of God's oneness and greatness.

The sociological relevance of symbolism is thus twofold: first, it binds individual believers to communal narratives, and second, it offers progressive integration of meaning across spiritual development. Rituals like prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage become spiritually effective only when integrated into a narrative that connects external acts to internal significance. Otherwise, they risk becoming empty obligations—performed without awareness. As Allport suggested, religion becomes mature only when it operates as a central organizing system of life, not merely a set of behavioral obligations (Allport, 1950).

2.5. Anthropomorphism in Religious Cognition

Anthropomorphism refers to the cognitive tendency to ascribe human attributes—thoughts, emotions, intentions—to nonhuman entities (Epley et al., 2007). Within the psychology of religion, it denotes the projection of human-like mental characteristics onto the Divine. Research has consistently shown that both children and adults tend to conceptualize God as having human-like mental capacities—such as perceiving, thinking, and feeling (Barrett, 2004; Heiphetz et al., 2016).

While adults may explicitly affirm the transcendence and incomparability of God, studies suggest that even mature believers often implicitly anthropomorphize the divine, especially in emotionally intense or ambiguous situations. For instance, in moments of crisis, individuals may imagine God as “angry,” “disappointed,” or even “proud”—terms deeply rooted in human experience (Boyer, 1994). This phenomenon demonstrates a natural but theologically problematic blending of divine ontology with human psychology.

From the perspective of the psychology of religion, anthropomorphic cognition constitutes a well-documented tendency in human religious thought, rather than a direct or necessary foundation of shirk. Faced with ontological uncertainty, individuals often rely on familiar cognitive schemas, which may lead them to imagine the divine in human-like terms, such as intentionality, emotion, or moral agency. While such representations are cognitively natural and widespread across religious traditions, they may—under certain interpretive frameworks—be viewed as limiting conceptions of divine transcendence. In Islamic theology, concerns arise not from anthropomorphism *per se*, but from the potential reification of such representations, in which symbolic or metaphorical images are treated as literal realities. In this sense, the risk lies not in anthropomorphic cognition itself, but in the uncritical absolutization of mental representations, which may shift religious focus from the transcendent Absolute to constructed images of the divine.

By contrast, the mature believer affirms the transcendence (*tanzih*) of the Divine and actively resists the urge to reduce God to mental projections. While acknowledging that religious language

relies on metaphor and symbol (as Geertz noted), the mature believer is cautious not to reify those symbols into ultimate realities. Classical theorists portrayed religious cognition as developing from totemistic imagery toward abstract monotheism (Lee et al., 2018); whatever the merits of such evolutionary schemes, the danger of symbolic regression persists (Geertz, 1973; Malinowski, 1982).

In sum, anthropomorphism enriches and makes religious discourse more accessible, but it also carries the latent risk of facilitating subtle forms of polytheistic thought. It is therefore the task of mature faith not to reject symbolism, but to refine it—to preserve the evocative power of religious symbols while guarding against their idolatrous distortion.

3. Discussion

The proposed typology of the polytheistic believer versus the mature believer provides a fresh perspective on longstanding themes in theology and religious psychology. It recasts the Qur’anic concept of shirk as a spectrum of religious orientation rather than a binary legal category. Within the Qur’anic discourse, repeated emphasis is placed on sincerity (ikhlāṣ) and inner intention (niyya), as opposed to the mere outward performance of religious acts (e.g., Qur’an 2:264; 39:2–3; 107:4–6). These passages have traditionally been interpreted as critiques of religiosity oriented toward social display or instrumental gain. From a sociopsychological perspective, this orientation corresponds to what Allport later conceptualized as extrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967), in which faith serves utilitarian and social ends and may coexist with unresolved ego-centered motivations. By contrast, the Qur’anic ideal of faith, grounded in sincerity, moral consistency, and inner transformation (e.g., Qur’an 13:28; 91:7–10), aligns more closely with intrinsic religiosity, in which belief constitutes a person’s core identity rather than a social instrument. This distinction resonates with classic insights in the psychology of religion. William James, in *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1902), distinguishes between what he describes as “the once-born” and “the twice-born,” or, more broadly, between immature and mature forms of religious life. For James, mature religiosity is characterized by inward integration, moral coherence, and existential depth, whereas immature religiosity remains externally driven, fragmented, and dependent on social or emotional compensation. In this sense, what traditional Islamic theology refers to as hidden shirk may be understood—at an analytical level—as overlapping conceptually with externally oriented religiosity, without reducing either framework to the other.

The typology also connects with theories of symbolic cognition. Geertz (1973) described religion as a symbolic system that establishes enduring moods and motivations. Our analysis shows that polytheistic believers tend to reify religious symbols or social hierarchies as ends in themselves, an approach that can generate legalism and division in communities. In contrast, mature believers treat symbols (rituals, doctrines) as signposts to transcendent truths rather than literal absolutes. Psychologically, this involves resisting anthropomorphism: research indicates that humans naturally impute human-like attributes to God, but mature faith resists such concretization. Polytheistic cognition accepts an image of God with human limits (e.g., imagining divine anger or favoritism),

which intensifies inner conflict. Mature cognition, by contrast, emphasizes tawhīd (unity) and tanzīh (divine transcendence), consistently guarding against idolizing the symbol rather than the reality. In theological terms, the distinction resonates with intra-faith and interfaith discourse. Within Islam, it underscores that shirk is not only a theological lapse but also a psychological one. Broadly, it echoes ideas found in other faiths: for example, Christian doctrine stresses the unity of God even within the Trinity (Nicene Creed: “one God... one Lord Jesus Christ... and in the Holy Spirit”). Judaism proclaims “the Lord our God is one Lord” (Deut. 6:4) to reject idolatries. By framing belief in terms of orientation rather than dogma alone, the typology can facilitate interfaith dialogue. It suggests that what appears as doctrinal disagreement may sometimes reflect differing religious motivations or levels of spiritual development. Recognizing the “polytheistic believer” pattern in any tradition can prompt constructive conversation about the role of ego and community in religion, while the “mature believer” ideal highlights the shared pursuit of internalized meaning and ethical living across faiths. Finally, this framework contributes to the psychology of religious maturity. Mature believers—like Fowler’s (1981) later stages of faith—derive deep meaning from their beliefs and show flexibility and empathy. They integrate their worldview with universal values, which support well-being and resilience. By contrast, polytheistic believers often experience dissonance and anxiety, as suggested by empirical studies: extrinsic orientation has been linked to prejudice and trait anxiety (Allport & Ross, 1967; Baker & Gorsuch, 1982). The typology thus aligns personal psychological outcomes with doctrinal concepts. Overall, distinguishing these types sharpens our understanding of religious orientation by linking the cognitive representation of the divine with spiritual maturity. It points to a path by which faith can move from a social badge to a lived, transformative conviction.

At this point, it is important to clarify that the term *müşrik dindar* is not intended to designate a distinct or empirically grounded psychological type. From a social-scientific perspective, adherence to polytheistic belief systems does not in itself constitute a form of religious maturity, and this conclusion can be drawn independently of any additional typological construction. Accordingly, this study does not treat polytheism as a developmental stage of religiosity, nor does it equate specific belief contents with psychological outcomes. Rather, references to shirk and *müşrik* are employed in an interpretive and illustrative sense, drawing on Islamic theological discourse to illuminate patterns of externally oriented religiosity already identified in the psychology of religion. The analytical focus of the typology remains firmly grounded in the intrinsic–extrinsic–quest framework articulated by Allport, James, and Batson, with theological concepts serving as contextual parallels rather than classificatory labels. In this way, the study seeks to preserve analytical objectivity while situating its discussion within a culturally meaningful conceptual horizon.

4. Limitations

The findings and conclusions of this study should be considered in light of certain limitations. First, this article presents a conceptual analysis and a theoretical model rather than an empirical

investigation. The validity and prevalence of the proposed "polytheistic believer" and "mature believer" typologies need to be tested through future qualitative and quantitative field studies. Second, the study relies heavily on classic theories in the psychology of religion, such as Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic religiosity. Despite the foundational importance of these models, more recent theories or critiques have not been included in the discussion, potentially narrowing the analysis's theoretical scope. Finally, the typology was developed primarily within the context of the Qur'an and Islamic theology, and its applicability in other belief systems is hypothetical. This requires caution regarding the model's cross-cultural and inter-religious generalizability.

5. Conclusions

This article has explored the psychosocial foundations of two distinct religious identity types: the polytheistic believer (*müşrik dindar*) and the mature believer (*olgun dindar*). Conceptually, the former reflects a faith orientation that instrumentalizes religion for ego-centered or socially driven motives. By contrast, the latter represents a stage of spiritual maturity in which belief is fully internalized and integrated into a comprehensive ethical system. Psychologically, the polytheistic believer is more prone to inner conflict, dissatisfaction, and anxiety, whereas the mature believer attains a sense of spiritual fulfillment and existential coherence.

Sociologically, polytheistic religiosity may contribute to legalistic rigidity, social stratification, and exclusionary dynamics. In contrast, mature religiosity fosters communal solidarity, compassion, and cooperative moral frameworks. Symbolically, the article examines how religious symbols function as tools of spiritual elevation or as potential traps of idolatrous fixation. Likewise, the discussion of anthropomorphism has highlighted how one's cognitive image of God can either enhance or undermine theological integrity.

Ultimately, the typological distinction articulated here holds significant value for both individual well-being and collective moral consciousness. In Muslim societies—and arguably in all religious cultures—achieving genuine spiritual maturity requires not only the internalization of *tawhīd* (divine unity), but also the ability to interpret symbolic structures and theological representations with depth, nuance, and humility.

However, it is important to note that Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic orientation model, upon which this typology is based, has been subject to criticism, despite being a foundational framework in its field. In the academic literature, it has been suggested that this sharp dichotomy risks oversimplifying the complex, multi-layered religious motivations of individuals. In reality, the motivations of many believers are neither purely intrinsic nor purely extrinsic; rather, these orientations are better understood as poles along a motivational continuum. This critique was articulated early on by Batson and Ventis (Batson et al., 1993; Batson & Ventis, 1982), who argued that the intrinsic–extrinsic distinction risks oversimplifying the complexity of religious motivation. To address this limitation, they introduced a third orientation—quest religiosity—which

conceptualizes faith as an open-ended, dynamic process characterized by questioning, exploration, and ongoing meaning-making rather than fixed commitment or instrumental use.

From this perspective, religiosity is not a static trait but a developmental and contextual phenomenon. An individual's religious orientation may shift over time or vary across life situations, reflecting movement between instrumental, internalized, and exploratory modes of belief. Interpreted in this light, the "polytheistic believer" and "mature believer" typology proposed in this study should be understood as ideal-typical reference points rather than rigid classifications. Rather than being invalidated by this dynamic view, the typology is conceptually enriched: it allows for transition, struggle, and transformation, acknowledging that religious life may involve periods of externalization, internalization, and reflective searching along a spiritual trajectory.

Future research should empirically validate this framework through qualitative and quantitative studies. Educational and pastoral settings, in particular, could benefit from integrating this typology into curricula and counseling practices. By doing so, religious education may shift from a model of ritual compliance to one of existential integration and ethical clarity—hallmarks of the truly mature believer.

Note

This article is derived from the author's master's thesis completed at Atatürk University, Institute of Social Sciences (Çinici, 2019). Bu çalışma, Murat Çinici'nin Atatürk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü'nde tamamladığı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is a theoretical work and does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Book Review

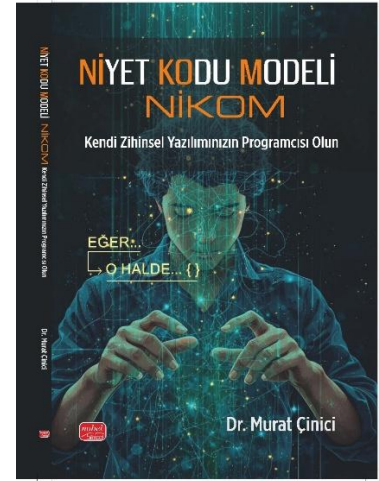
Niyet Kodu Modeli (NİKOM): Kendi Zihinsel Yazılımınızın Programcısı Olun

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Book Review and Critical Analysis

Methodological Note

This study is a critical book review and not an empirical investigation. Its method is conceptual-analytical. The model proposed in the book is reconstructed in its own terms, then tested for internal consistency, theoretical adequacy, and external connection to current literature in the psychology of religion, cognitive psychology, and neuroscience. The analysis combines three steps: (a) reading the work in light of the author's explicit aims; (b) mapping its conceptual architecture onto established frameworks (e.g., Mischel & Shoda, 1995; Paloutzian & Park, 2013); and (c) appraising the empirical anchors that support the model. No new data is produced. The aim is interpretive and evaluative rather than confirmatory.

1. External Examination: Identity of the Work

Niyet Kodu Modeli (NİKOM): Kendi Zihinsel Yazılımınızın Programcısı Olun [The Intention Code Model (NİKOM): Become the Programmer of Your Own Mental Software], authored by Murat Çinici, was published in its first edition in January 2026 by Nobel Academic Publishing under the Nobel Scientific Works imprint (Çinici, 2026). The publication carries the sequence number 2887, with the print ISBN 978-625-364-071-2 and the e-ISBN 978-625-364-072-9. The volume comprises 11 preliminary and 192 main pages, printed in a 16.5 x 24 cm format. According to the library cataloging data, the work includes a bibliography but lacks an index. The book is categorized under the headings of psychology of religion, cognitive psychology, personal development, intention, mental coding, and neuroplasticity.

The cover design and the back-cover blurb position the work in a popular-intellectual niche. The back cover frames the mind as a “biological computer” and beliefs as the software governing it. This framing is older than the book itself and goes back to functionalist accounts of mind (Putnam, 1967) and to early cognitive science (Neisser, 1967). The target audience is not restricted to academic readers; the book also addresses a broad public interested in psychology, computer science, theology, and the general mechanics of the mind.

Biographical information about the author is limited within the volume. Based on the preface, Murat Çinici has a background in computer engineering, conducts doctoral research on artificial intelligence, and works primarily in the psychology of religion. The book can therefore be read as an interdisciplinary essay that synthesizes the author's technical-cognitive background with his interest in the psychology of religion (cf. Paloutzian & Park, 2013).

2. Internal Examination Objectives

Objectives

The primary objective of the book is to reinterpret intention (niyet) not only as a religious or ethical declaration, but as a “start command” that activates cognitive, neurobiological, and behavioral processes (Çinici, 2026, pp. 17–24). The author argues that intention fires neural

networks, regulates hormones, and influences the body at the cellular level. He also states that NIKOM aims to introduce a new explanatory language to the psychology of religion through concepts such as “code,” “activation,” and “alignment,” and that the model is intended to be developed into a clinically applicable framework.

Within this objective, the book operates on three levels. First, it builds a conceptual model of human behavior. Second, it applies this model to individual, social, and religious domains. Third, it invites the reader to identify and rewrite their own mental codes. The third element shows that the work is not purely theoretical; it also carries a practical and transformative claim, similar in spirit to applied cognitive-behavioral approaches (Beck, 2011).

The target audience is multi-layered. Despite the use of academic terminology and scientific references, the frequent inclusion of everyday examples and direct address suggests that the book aims at both academic and general readers. The work therefore occupies a hybrid space between an academic monograph and an intellectual-popular self-development manual. This is an interpretive judgment, but the language and presentation of the text strongly support it.

Content

The book is structured into four primary chapters: “Foundations of NIKOM,” “Applications and Case Analyses,” “Dialogues, Critiques, and Advanced Analyses,” and “Evaluation and Future Vision” (Çinici, 2026). The work first establishes a theoretical framework, then moves to applied examples, and finally offers a self-critical evaluation. The model is not confined to psychological processes; it extends to social codes, religious rituals, popular culture, hypnosis, art, humor, and artificial intelligence.

The central thesis is that the human mind carries codes written through experience and suggestion. These codes are formulated in an IF [condition], THEN [expectation/result] format, and intention is described as the process that activates them (Çinici, 2026, pp. 31–58). Behaviors, emotions, and certain physiological responses are therefore not determined only by conscious choice; they are also driven by pre-installed codes. The author situates this framework within the debates of behaviorism (Skinner, 1953) and cognitive psychology (Neisser, 1967), and uses placebo, nocebo, and the self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1948) as the empirical pillars of the model.

To clarify the conceptual architecture, the central NIKOM components are summarized in Table 1.

Table 1*Schematic Summary of the NĪKOM Model*

Component	Description in NĪKOM
Mind-as-Computer	The mind is treated as a biological information-processing system whose operations can be described in software-like terms (Çinici, 2026, pp. 17–24).
Code	A learned IF–THEN rule encoded through experience, suggestion, and culture (Çinici, 2026, pp. 31–42).
Intention	A start command that activates the relevant code and recruits cognitive, affective, and physiological resources (Çinici, 2026, pp. 45–58).
Activation	The conversion of an intention into measurable cognitive, neural, hormonal, and behavioral outputs (Çinici, 2026, pp. 60–72).
Alignment	Coherence between belief, expectation, emotion, and behavior; misalignment is presented as the source of dysfunction (Çinici, 2026, pp. 74–86).
Rewriting	Deliberate revision of maladaptive codes, framed as a clinical and pedagogical target (Çinici, 2026, pp. 121–134).
Empirical Anchors	Placebo, nocebo, self-fulfilling prophecy, and neuroplasticity are used as the principal empirical supports (Çinici, 2026, pp. 88–110).

Note. Adapted from Çinici (2026). Page references are approximate.

The originality of the work lies in its reading of intention not as mere rational planning but as an activator intertwined with emotion, expectation, belief, and bodily processes. NĪKOM is presented as filling a gap between the “black box” of behaviorism (Skinner, 1953) and the “cold” information-processing mind of classical cognitivism (Neisser, 1967; Searle, 1980). The author also re-reads worship, faith, and tawakkul through this lens, in continuity with current debates in the psychology of religion (Hood et al., 2018; Pargament, 1997).

The book does not stop at theory. It proposes applications ranging from child-rearing and gender stereotypes to religious rituals, education systems, leadership, and artificial intelligence modeling. This breadth increases the appeal of the work but also raises the well-known risk of theoretical overreach (Popper, 1959/2002): a model that explains too many domains may lose analytical precision.

Methodology

The book is not based on experimental or field research in the classical sense. Its method is primarily conceptual-synthetic: an explanatory model is constructed by integrating personal observations, psychological literature, neuroscience, the psychology of religion, sociology, anthropology, and computational metaphors (Çinici, 2026, pp. 11–16). This places the work within the broader interdisciplinary tradition that connects cognitive science with the study of religion (Paloutzian & Park, 2013).

The method is theoretical construction rather than empirical validation. The author himself states at the end of the volume that the model must be tested through future experimental work and concrete measurement (Çinici, 2026, pp. 175–188). At its current stage, NIKOM is therefore best described as a developed theoretical proposal, not a tested theory. Falsifiability remains a key criterion for further development (Popper, 1959/2002).

A distinctive methodological feature is the use of personal life narratives as entry points for theoretical construction. Stories such as the ice-cream-illness episode, the rapid deterioration of the author's mother after diagnosis, and everyday suggestions given to children serve as departure points for the model. These narratives make the text vivid, but they also raise the risk of anecdotal weight in theory production. Illustrative cases can clarify a model; they cannot, on their own, confirm it (Yin, 2018).

Language and Style

The language of the book is hybrid. On one hand, the bibliography, conceptual distinctions, and technical terminology produce an academic register. On the other hand, expressions such as “become the programmer of your own mind,” “code-breaking,” and “the courage to rewrite” carry a motivational and didactic tone. The result is an academic-popular synthesis rather than a strict academic monograph.

Metaphor is the most effective narrative tool in the book. Mind–computer, code, operating system, hard drive, running a program, and debugging are used systematically to concretize abstract psychological processes. This choice increases accessibility and pedagogical reach. However, the same density of metaphor occasionally reduces human experience to the “logic of software,” a tension long noted in the philosophy of mind (Searle, 1980; Dreyfus, 1992). The criticism here is not that metaphors are used, but that their saturation occasionally substitutes for analysis.

The text relies on conceptual flow and ordered headings rather than on tables, charts, or dense visual diagrams. The chapter titles and subheadings are well organized, which supports the reader's engagement. The glossary increases terminological accessibility. The absence of an index, however, is a real deficit for concept-oriented academic use.

3. Evaluation

Strengths

The most compelling strength of the work is its ambition to build an original conceptual model. NIKOM tries to unify intention, belief, expectation, behavior, and physiology under a single explanatory schema. For readers facing fragmented literature in the psychology of religion (Hood et al., 2018), this integrative move has clear synthetic value. Disparate phenomena are read through a common logic of code, and a meta-language of explanation is proposed.

A second strength is interdisciplinarity. The text brings the psychology of religion, cognitive psychology, neuroscience, sociology, anthropology, and computational metaphors into the same discourse (Çinici, 2026, pp. 17–110). The effort to carve out a shared conceptual space between theology and modern cognitive science is noteworthy. The classical Islamic principle “actions are judged by intentions” is reread through current cognitive science, opening a fresh interpretive space for both fields (cf. Paloutzian & Park, 2013).

A third strength is the inclusion of an explicit self-critical section. The author acknowledges that the model risks under-modeling external structural conditions and may marginalize factors beyond individual control (Çinici, 2026, pp. 165–174). This transparency increases the intellectual integrity of the work.

Weaknesses and Limitations

The most prominent weakness is that the theoretical claims expand faster than the empirical foundation. NIKOM aspires to explain a wide range of phenomena, but most explanations rest on conceptual parallels, literature reviews, and illustrative narratives rather than on directly tested data. The author partially admits this and expresses hope that the model will be rendered empirically visible in future work. At present, NIKOM is closer to a hypothesis or framework than to a validated theory.

A second limitation is the over-extension of the explanatory scope. Applying the same schema to clinical psychology, child education, social rituals, religious practices, economics, politics, art, divination, hypnosis, leadership, and artificial intelligence raises the risk of over-generalization (Popper, 1959/2002). If a model can be applied to everything, it becomes harder to identify where it fails.

A third limitation concerns the mind–computer metaphor. The metaphor makes complex processes visible, but it can also reduce human experience. Translating multi-layered phenomena—emotions, historical context, unconscious conflicts, social inequalities—into the language of code can produce analytical loss (Searle, 1980; Dreyfus, 1992). Translating structural problems into individual codes risks placing an excessive moral burden on the individual. The author admits that the model cannot change structural realities such as poverty, systemic injustice, or economic crisis. The admission is appropriate, yet it also marks the boundary of the model.

A fourth limitation is the oscillation between scientific discourse and motivational rhetoric. This is an asset for general readership but a challenge for academic rigor. In some sections the explanatory tone shifts from analysis to suggestion. The text therefore moves on a permeable line between academic inquiry and personal-development literature. The result may be read as a strength or a weakness depending on the reader.

Place in the Field

This work functions less as a conventional textbook in an established subfield and more as a foundational text proposing a new model. It stands at the intersection of the psychology of religion, cognitive psychology, and personal-development literature (cf. Hood et al., 2018; Paloutzian & Park, 2013). Its main contribution is to reframe intention not only in ethical or religious terms, but in terms of cognitive-psychophysiological activation. Its ability to generate shared concepts between theology and psychology distinguishes it from earlier Turkish-language works in the field.

The lasting place of the model in the field will depend on subsequent empirical work. The proposed concepts must be operationalized, measured, and tested across diverse samples. Otherwise, NİKOM may remain an impressive explanatory metaphor rather than a robust scientific model. The value of the work should therefore be sought not only in its current content, but also in the research program it may initiate.

Conclusion

Murat Çinici's *Niyet Kodu Modeli (NİKOM)* is an ambitious, interdisciplinary study that explains the workings of the mind through the concepts of code, activation, alignment, and rewriting (Çinici, 2026). The book builds a bridge between the psychology of religion and cognitive science and reopens intention to both theoretical and practical reconsideration. Its greatest success is the synthesis of seemingly fragmented phenomena within a common explanatory language; its greatest challenge is that this language sometimes precedes empirical validation and risks an over-generalized framework.

The book is best evaluated not as a finalized scientific theory, but as a theoretically remarkable model proposal with strong metaphorical capacity and high application potential. It is a foundational text that generates new questions rather than a final word offering definitive conclusions. It deserves to be read with academic "cautious optimism" and serious intellectual interest.

Ethics Committee Approval

This study is a theoretical work and does not require ethics committee approval.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declare(s) no conflict of interest.

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