

UNIVERSITY TRAINING IN PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY: A NEED OR UTOPIA?

FORMACIÓN UNIVERSITARIA EN PSICOLOGÍA DE LA RELIGIÓN Y LA ESPIRITUALIDAD: ¿NECESIDAD O UTOPIA?

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ABSTRACT

This theoretical research is positioned within the field of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality. Its goals are to analyze the training received by psychology students in this field, as well as the attitudes of the instructors in charge of such training. Based on research, it is reported that the religious and spiritual dimension is critical in an individual's development; consequently, it is of outmost importance that future psychologists be prepared to understand the way such variables as faith in God, spiritual well-being, beliefs, convictions and needs, and coping styles, among others, affect the human being. Since most Latin American universities do not offer training courses related to this field, a revision of curricula is suggested, so as to identify gaps in such training and include courses that will enable future psychologists to fully perform their duties.

Keywords: spirituality; university training; religion; psychology

RESUMEN

La presente investigación teórica se ubica en el campo de la Psicología de la Religión y la Espiritualidad. Sus objetivos son analizar la formación que recibe el estudiante de psicología en este campo y las actitudes del docente encargado de su formación. Se reporta que de acuerdo a las investigaciones, la dimensión religiosa y espiritual es crucial en el desarrollo de la persona, por lo que se plantea la urgencia que los futuros psicólogos estén preparados para conocer cómo afectan variables como la fe en Dios, el bienestar espiritual, las creencias, convicciones

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y necesidades espirituales, estilos de afrontamiento, entre otros, al ser humano. Dado que la mayoría de las universidades latinoamericanas no brindan cursos de formación vinculados a este campo, se sugiere la revisión de las mallas curriculares para identificar los vacíos en la formación e incorporar cursos que permitan a los futuros psicólogos el cumplimiento cabal de sus funciones.

Palabras clave: espiritualidad; formación universitaria; religión; psicología

INTRODUCTION

According to Díaz, Hernández, Rigo, Saad and Delgado (2006), the deep transformations experienced nowadays, in highly-changing social contexts, which are inherent to globalization, put the current paradigms regarding professional learning at the universities to the test.

As per Enríquez (2013), the university faces new requirements: production and organization of knowledge required by the economic and social players; the pressure to win a strategic position in the economic configuration of globalization and competitiveness. Additionally, it is forced to reshape the spaces for production, dissemination and transfer of knowledge due to the ongoing challenges it faces.

Currently, it is noted that on a worldwide scale there is an increasing interest in bringing first-class education focused on achieving high-quality standards that will allow us to rely on professionals who are highly-trained, competent and skilled in different areas of expertise. Since education has a direct influence over each aspect of human life, it is unquestionable that higher education should

provide the necessary knowledge and tools to face everyday life, in order to achieve the personal, social, cultural, economical and political growth of our people. Nevertheless, at the same time, there is a void regarding the integral education that supposedly is fundamental to what universities should provide in modern times. This is why the educational model has to be thought over, so we are not stuck with an excess of knowledge, information, abilities and techniques that only bring about more specialists. To make real progress, we have to go further.

In a report submitted to UNESCO by the International Committee for Education in the 21st Century, it is clearly stated that the pillars of education are not only “learn to know” and “learn to do”, but also “learn to live together” and “learn to be”. The committee has made an emphasis on a fundamental principle: education must contribute to the global development of each person—mind and body, intelligence, sensibility, sense of aesthetics, individual responsibility and spirituality (Delors et al., 1996).

To some authors, religion is one of the subject matters of the integral education that should be provided by universities. According

to De La Calle (2010), it is also the university's responsibility to motivate their students. From an honest standpoint and respecting their liberty, it is their responsibility to dig deep into their religious beliefs and develop that fundamental part of their persona.

Lopez says (2014) that one of the challenges that higher education institutions in Latin America and the Caribbean face in their evaluation and accreditation processes is having to prioritize productivity and economic growth (sometimes unsustainable) indicators at the expense of indicators that measure key values for equity, social harmony and environmental sustainability.

Under this argument many questions arise: What should be taught in modern universities? (Esteban and Buxarrais, 2004). Is the way in which universities manage the knowledge they produce adapted to what society demands from organizations? Does it adapt to the new reality of global competition that affects and creates new demands? (Enriquez, 2013). According to Bruzzone (2006) it is also necessary to ask ourselves: what does it mean to educate in a world misguided by its lack of values and under threat from existential emptiness? Is an education that integrates cultural and religious diversity with the purpose of finding common ground even possible?

To Garbanzo (2011), higher education is where you teach and develop the people that make up the qualified human capital of a nation; nevertheless, in the current global context that isn't necessarily the case. One of Latin Americas' deficiencies regarding higher education are the outdated curriculums.

As for psychology, the education of future professionals has been enriched by the

different lines that have emerged in recent years (Sports Psychology, Communitarian Psychology, Forensic Psychology, Legal Psychology, Political Psychology, etc.). Nevertheless, the same progress hasn't been accomplished in the field of Religious and Spiritual Psychology.

When analyzing the education given to a future psychologist, there's the absence of courses linked to Religious and Spiritual Psychology in most Latin American universities in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Ecuador, among others. There are very few universities that offer courses related to this.

This is probably due to the fact that during the last couple of decades there has been rejection towards the study of religious and spiritual subjects. According to Florenzano (2010), one of the reasons why it is difficult to work in this field is the misunderstanding of the religious subject matter because, to many, it is synonymous to intolerant, dogmatic and ignorant points of view.

Nevertheless, even though religion and spirituality have been ignored by psychologists for decades (because they conceived them as being pathological or a limited cognitive process designed for certain functions), currently there has been a radical change due to scientific investigations that prove their unquestionable importance (e.g., Pérez, Sandino and Gómez, 2005; González, 2004; Whetsell, Frederickson, Aguilera and Maya, 2005; Canaval, González and Sánchez, 2007, Costa et al., 2008, among others)

This is why in the last couple of years we have witnessed a newfound interest for the study of Religious and Spiritual Psychology, as noted by the increasing

number of publications (García-Alandete and Pérez, 2005). This is indicative of the level of consciousness in various academic and professional circles, regarding the need to consider spirituality as an essential and integral part of every human being's personality development (Richard and Bergin, 1997; Corey, 1996; as cited by Pérez Santiago, 2007). This has come to the point that to some disciplines, spiritual well being is considered part of one's health condition, along with physical, mental and social well being (Pedrão and Beresin, 2010).

It has been found that spirituality contributes to healthier lifestyles and behavior, associated to a lower risk of contracting diseases and a different attitude towards the loss of health. Because of this, its use has been completely justified in social support programs directed towards the treatment of high-risk and chronic diseases (Navas and Villegas, 2006). According to Ermel et al. (2015), the current trend in healthcare is to see human beings from a holistic perspective (mind, body and soul). Therefore, it has been confirmed that spirituality can make an important contribution to health and the prevention of diseases (Marques, 2003) and that religion benefits people's overall health (Pereira, 2013).

Other investigations praise the benefits religion, religiosity, spirituality and spiritual well being have on facing violence (Canaval et al., 2007). Spirituality has been linked to lower mortality rates, lesser depression, lower risk of cirrhosis, emphysema, suicide, lesser use of hospital services, and even a lower tendency to smoking (Pinto, 2007). On the other hand, it has been found that spirituality and religion are important when it comes to facing incarceration and stressful life events, as a mean to find inner peace, it being also

associated to lowering the risk of suicide and the prevention of future delinquency (Mandhouj, Aubin, Amirouche, Perroud and Huguelet, 2014). For those who live amidst crisis, spiritual well being can be a personal growth factor, a transcendent event that brings them closer to many answers that give meaning to everyday life, pain and human suffering (Sánchez, 2009). Religious practices and spirituality are considered to play an efficient role as guides, as help in difficult situations and as sources of knowledge and personal commitment (Martínez, 2006). To Rivera and Montero (2007), spiritual life seems to play an important role in coping with stress and maintaining health in older adulthood.

It is undeniable that human beings have spiritual needs, which are related to the purpose or meaning of life (Rodríguez, 2006). Spirituality raises questions about the purpose and reasons to live, it does not limit itself to certain types of beliefs or practices (Gastaud et. al., 2006). All people, believers and non-believers, have spirituality and spiritual needs that grow and evolve during their lifetime. When faced with more meaningful existential situations, and evidently when faced with a serious illness that limits or threatens life, questions about causes and meanings are raised, as well as uncertainties about life projects, fears, guilt, the need for balance, reconciliations and hope (Beca, 2008).

Taking into account the amount of investigations done, it is obvious that there is clear and abundant evidence of the link between religious life and spiritual and physical and mental health (Rivera, 2007). Therefore, spirituality has been considered as an integral part of health, well being and quality of life (Sanchez, 2008). It is assumed

that spirituality is a basic dimension of every human being, from their way of relating with themselves, with others and with God, to their way of conducting themselves through the world, finding a purpose in life, transcending, which is fundamental for acquiring a sense of accomplishment, fulfillment and well being.

Given the discoveries found in different research studies about the role that spirituality and religion play in the growth of a human being and how it affects different aspects of their life, it seems reasonable to think that these subjects should be taken into account in the education of a future psychologist.

The role spirituality has in a human being's life is undeniable; from giving it purpose and motivation to move on, to the possibility of transcending and being at peace with themselves, with others and especially with God. To Jaramillo, Carvajal, Marin and Ramirez (2008), the concept of a holistic human goes beyond believing that we are bio-psycho-social beings, but that were also spiritual and religious. To renounce to this dimension of human life would be to ignore fundamental aspects of a person's development.

Because of the strong impact that research has had, science now recognizes that human beings are spiritual and religious; which is proven by various displays throughout humanity's development, resulting in an increasing academic interest in subjects linked to self-transcendence, faith, spiritual beliefs and convictions, spiritual necessities, coping with religion, spiritual perspective, spiritual wellbeing, among others.

It is important to take into account that even though there are various scientific

studies linked to religion and spirituality, they've generally been carried out in Anglo-Saxon countries, mainly by psychiatrists, nurses and social workers, and not so many psychologists. On the other hand, in Latin America, there is a sparse amount of empirical research about the subject, despite the cultural and historical importance of religion and spirituality in Spanish-speaking populations (Quiceno and Vinaccia, 2009), which in itself show a definite lack of vision and prejudice, which has lead spirituality and religion to be excluded, rejected and questioned in Hispanic academic circles.

For the reasons set out above, because of the characteristics of the globalized world, the requirements it demands and the scarce body of knowledge about Spiritual and Religious Psychology, it is important to analyze the education given to psychology students in this field and the attitude taken by the professors in charge of their education.

An analysis of the education given to a student, who in the near future will begin to work as a psychologist.

King and Dein (1998) spoke of the need to have future health professionals consider religious practices relevant in their everyday work; not by proselytizing religion onto healthy or sick people or their families, thereby engaging in non-ethical behavior (Sloan and Bagiella, 2002), but by capitalizing on the natural and spontaneous tendencies of religious believers in benefit of their health. Therefore, any professional's attitude should stray from minimizing religious beliefs or their values through explicit or implicit disregard, as well from pretending to discard or change a patient's doctrinal precepts by criticizing them (as cited in González, 2004).

Accordingly, it is fundamental that future psychologists get a formal education in the religious and spiritual fields. As pointed out by San Martin (2007), no profession can appropriate the spiritual field; nevertheless, it is evident that psychologists yet have much to do.

You may be asking yourself why it should be important that future psychologists receive a formal education in the field of Religious and Spiritual Psychology. The answer is that scientific studies constantly manifest more evidence of the substantial impact religion and spirituality have over people's lives, health condition, quality of life, resiliency to face adversity, their vision and life purpose, ability to transcend, among other aspects.

Faced with this scenario, it becomes necessary to figure out how to educate future psychologists in what concerns the spiritual necessities of patients or clients.

It may be interesting to evoke a study carried out by Shafranske in the year 2000 (as cited in Florenzano, 2010), in which he researched the religiosity of mental health professionals. For this investigation, he polled a sample of 355 psychiatrists from the American Psychiatric Association and 253 psychologists from the American Psychological Association. He found that in regard to the necessity of exploring and taking into account their patients religious affiliations in therapy, 50% of psychiatrists and 87% of psychologists found it important. At the same time, both psychiatrists and psychologists felt that religious and spiritual subjects weren't touched upon sufficiently during their professional training.

On the other hand, Saunders, Petrik and Miller (2014) carried out a research on 543

students from the clinical and psychological counseling doctorate programs, who were polled on the educational experiences they had in what concerns dealing with the religious and spiritual practices and beliefs of their patients. Around one fourth of the polled students stated that they hadn't received any formal education related to patient's religious and spiritual needs. The rest had only read on the subject on their own or had discussed it with their supervisors. Nevertheless, the polled students supported the idea that patients should be asked about spirituality and religiosity. According to these authors, this supports the argument that these students receive a formal education that is possibly inadequate.

In turn, Vogel, McMinn, Peterson and Gathercoal (2013) evaluated the educational content concerning spirituality and religious diversity in the doctorate programs accredited by the APA and in pre-doctoral practices, by gathering 292 students', interns', professors' and career directors' point of view. The results showed that the participants perceived that various areas of professional competence are neglected, such as the understanding of the world's main religions and spiritual systems. The research also revealed that the doctorate programs and pre-doctoral practices depend on informal sources and not on learning systems in order to provide knowledge on the diversity of religions and spirituality. The authors pointed out that courses, research and a teaching approach are rarely used to improve the formal education regarding religious diversity and spirituality.

Costa et al. (2008) lead a study on college students majoring in psychology and found that 83,8% are interested in spirituality

and its subject matter, and that 77,9% are interested in discussing it within their formal education. The same authors, after analyzing their research, argued that even though religiosity and spirituality are subjects that are relevant in modern society's everyday life, they still haven't found their way into formal higher education.

It is obvious that there is a void in the education that future psychologists receive. Rodriguez, Fernandez, Perez and Noriega (2001) claim that a psychologist who doesn't take into account, understands enough or ignores the religious-spiritual dimension of a person or community (seeing it as a cognitive obstacle or as an irrelevant factor in what concerns human development) is denying or underestimating a fundamental aspect of a person and of the religion's role as an instrument of healing through the relationship it establishes with its believer.

As to what concerns the academic curriculum, you can ask: are there any courses about Religious and Spiritual Psychology? Or at least something related to that area of expertise? If so, are scientific discoveries about the impact that faith, beliefs and spiritual needs have on quality of life, health, sense of well-being and transcendence, etc., even discussed or analyzed? Are measuring instruments linked to these variables even taught? Are there any specific areas developed in order to investigate these aspects of a person within the evaluation and diagnosis? Is their support or motivation to carry out new investigations that dig into aspects of religion and spirituality and their effects over different parts of life?

An analysis of why it is important to show the impact caused by variables linked to religion and spirituality is necessary. For

example, the DSM-5 includes religious and spiritual problems—V62.89 (Z65.8)—and points out that this category should be used when the clinical subject's problem stems from religion or spirituality. Within the examples, there are agonizing experiences that imply the loss or questioning of faith, problems related to the conversion to a new faith or the questioning of spiritual values that aren't related to an official church or religious organization (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

The questions that come up are: do future psychologists, in their formal education, receive the proper tools that enable them to carry out a correct diagnosis? Do they know how to make a distinction between health and mental illness in this field? Will they resort to prejudice or pathological labels? Do future psychologists get the proper amount of academic education that will allow them to distinguish intense religious or spiritual experiences from outstandingly pathological ones? How will they be able to recognize the difference between profound faith in God and mental impairment, if they haven't learned it in their university?

According to San Martin (2007), the spiritual-religious dimension cannot be neglected when evaluating, diagnosing and treating people. Nevertheless, based on the way the educational system is currently set up in universities, it is difficult to touch upon religious and spiritual subjects with psychology students. This is proven by various research that have found that formal education in psychology doesn't provide its students the necessary knowledge about the relationship between spirituality and clinical practice (Ancona-Lopez, 2008; Angerami-Camon 2008; Boccalandro,

2004; Bruscajin et al., 2008, as cited in Cavalheiro and Falcke, 2014).

Accordingly, the following question can be asked: are people's religious and spiritual belief systems used in comprehensive intervention plans?

Vieten et al. (2013) asserts that religion and spirituality have been empirically linked to a series of positive mental health and well being test results. Also, there's evidence that suggests that clients prefer their spirituality and religion be taken into account in psychotherapy. Nevertheless, more often are religious and spiritual matters not discussed in psychotherapy nor are they included in the evaluation or planned treatment. The majority of psychotherapists receive little to no education in religions and spiritual matter, partly because there isn't a consensus on how to deal with these topics nor are there educational guides to teach them.

According to Florenzano (2010), psychological interventions could take into account patients' spiritual belief systems, not to proselytize or criticize their religious faith, but to integrate these beliefs into the comprehensive intervention plans.

For example, after researching spirituality as a variable associated to resiliency, Rodriguez et al. (2011) assert that the literature on this topic confirm that spirituality plays an important role in evaluating resiliency in different areas and stages of human development. This should be sufficient evidence for universities to include the subject of spirituality as an essential part of their professional curriculums, at both the under and postgraduate level.

But going further into the analysis, a question comes up, of whether the deficient

education in religious and spiritual subjects is a result of the lack of courses in academic curriculums or reflection of a lacking integral education.

Studies like the one done by Jaramillo et al. (2008) found that psychology students exhibit symptoms of emotional and eating disorders, as well as behavioral issues such as suicidal and abortive tendencies, and in general, considering their lifestyle and attitude, the tendency to consume alcohol and psychoactive drugs.

What happens in the spiritual and religious dimension of psychology students?

In a study done by Cavalheiro and Falcke (2014) on psychology students from 25 universities, it was found that they had significantly lower levels of spiritual well being. When comparing first year to last year students, the difference was in the religious aspect. The higher the education level, the lower the belief in God. According to these authors, the statistics point to the fact that an education in psychology probably contributes to lesser spirituality and the disbelief of God. What stands out is that for psychology students, spirituality has a negative or very negative influence on self-knowledge, quality of life and mental health; which shows their ignorance of current research that prove the contrary.

At the same time, Gastaud et al. (2006) carried out a study with a statistical population made up of Psychology students of all years from the same university, who were compared to Medicine and Law students. The results found that those who studied Psychology had a lower level of spiritual well being than Medicine and Law students. They found this to be worrisome due to the fact that they were too distant to

spiritual-religious matter, despite the proven association between spirituality and health.

Faced with these discoveries, certain questions come up: What type of education do psychology students receive? Do they really get a comprehensive education? Do their own spiritual life and beliefs—whichever they are—influence the way they respond to scientific evidence in this field? Do stereotypes and prejudice influence their attitude towards religious and spiritual subjects? When it is time for the future psychologist to work professionally and work on something linked to religion and spirituality, will they do it objectively, free from prejudice, respectfully, whether their beliefs are similar to their patient's or not?

Human beings—whether they want to or not—inevitably have to face situations in life related to loss, disease, death and misfortune. These moments in their lives are when spiritual beliefs manifest, whichever they may be. That being said, what role do psychologists play when faced with these situations? How do they handle them? Do they ignore them, deny them or treat them like an integral part of human development, without prejudice? What happens if the psychologist is religious or not? What is his or her relation with God, others and himself? How does it affect his personal and professional life? Does he respect others' beliefs, whether he agrees or not? Does he impose his atheism or faith? Does his spiritual dimension contribute to the way he works? What can the psychologist gain or lose from incorporating the religious-spiritual dimension into his job? Will the psychologist—whether he or she is religious, atheist or agnostic—want to impose his or her beliefs? Will their spiritual beliefs allow them to be more sensitive towards others' needs, therefore, enriching his vision? Do only those

who have a rich spiritual life understand others' spiritual needs or is it unnecessary?

There isn't a doubt that psychology is one of the careers that deals the most with spirituality. The majority of people ask themselves at some point in their lives: What do we live for? What is the point of living? How do we face pain, illness, suffering and adversities? Because of this, there is a concern regarding which psychologist is trained to aid someone in these aspects of life. Also, a concern as to why these topics are left aside when they're vital and transcendent to all creeds and cultures of human existence.

Based on the above arguments, we can agree with Cavalheiro and Fackle (2014) that a new design of the educational paradigms of psychological science is necessary, as well as an evaluation of how religion and spirituality are currently being treated in future psychologists' formal education.

This formal education does not only refer to the courses and training they receive in the field of Religious and Spiritual Psychology; but also to the integral education students receive in their university classrooms. This should have as goal, making sure students become mature, balanced, stable, at ease with themselves and with others, open, free and tolerant towards others' beliefs, knowledgeable of the limits between their beliefs and those of others, with a high sense of ethics and respect towards other people's dignity.

It is necessary to keep in mind that those who study psychology, in a few years, will be professionals dealing with human behavior, health, and will work close to people with their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, lifestyles, capabilities, potentials, pain

and weaknesses; everything that makes up the complexity of human life. This is why it is essential that they get a solid education with the latest advances in the field, including Religious and Spiritual Psychology.

Analyzing the attitudes taken by those in charge of educating future psychologists

In today's global scenario, we should ask ourselves: What attitudes do teachers have in the university classrooms? Teachers are much often experts in presenting competencies in their courses, designing teaching strategies and utilizing sophisticated technological resources. Nevertheless, they don't provide answers to questions like: What has to be done in order to provide integral education to students? How do you approach subjects linked to spirituality and religion? Is spirituality approached as an integral part of human beings? Do teachers, who are responsible for educating future psychologists, take into account variables linked to religion, spirituality with professionalism and ethics, without thinking of stereotypes that cloud their judgment?

According to Gastaud et al. (2006), within the Psychology programs faculty there still is a gap between religion and science. To Bolletino, 2001 (as cited in Rivera, 2007), in order to adequately respond to people's spiritual needs and demands, psychologists have to stop treating their clients' religious and spiritual beliefs and experiences as pathological disorders, and start thinking of spirituality as a healthy and important concept. He also considers that for spirituality to be included in professional practice, it must be conceived as a dimension of a human being, inseparable from other dimensions. It must also be considered compatible with the rest of dimensions

that make up a person, and not as one that opposes any of the others.

It's undeniable that too often we hear university professors say that he who is a true scientist must stop believing in God. What type of role model is a university professor, when he can't even respect the religious freedom and tolerance that is supposed to be present in classrooms? Do educators value religious students the same as non-religious students, or on the contrary, do they engage in stereotypes, alienation and discrimination towards those who manifest their spiritual and religious beliefs? If so, we could legitimately ask ourselves: Where is the respect for students' beliefs? If teachers don't share the same religious and spiritual beliefs as students, do they even have the right to tell others to stop believing because it is not smart? Is that ethical? Is religious diversity, which is protected by a nation's constitution, respected?

It is obvious that whether the educator is a believer, an atheist or agnostic, that shouldn't influence the way they approach subjects related to religion and spirituality. Those should be treated with seriousness and objectivity, accordingly to the scientific discoveries in this field. It isn't about proselytizing or imposing ones own beliefs, nor punishing students' beliefs—whichever they may be; it is about the teacher being an ethical, respectful and open minded person when it comes to religious and spiritual diversity. Only then, can they contribute to students' integral education, as well as to their education in subjects related to Religious and Spiritual Psychology.

Given the importance spiritual well being has in society and universities, it is essential that professional education takes into

account religious and spiritual experiences, considering the social and cultural context of the experiencing individuals. Accordingly, the courses specialized on this subject must invest in programs that will sensitize educators about these topics. The spiritual dimension can't be excluded from academic training, because of its relevance and the harm it can cause if not properly understood (Costa et al., 2008).

Currently, it is expected from an educator to be the one who passes on knowledge to students, manages information and the curriculum, shares experiences and thoughts about the academic content in the form of dialogue and tolerance, in such a way that students will become engaged and committed to the learning process (Gonzales Tirados and Gonzales Maura, 2007). In other words, the educator must not impose his or her beliefs, prejudice or stereotypes. On the contrary, the teacher must be open, receptive, analytical and critical, inciting debate and discussion, with an objective outlook based on scientific evidence.

As pointed out by Esteban and Buxarras (2004), the modern day university professor must be professional with the ability to reflect on certain topics. Higher education that stems from reflection promotes reflexive learning and moves the conversation away from indoctrination and false truths. An educator who follows this philosophy would be able to touch upon subjects linked to the scientific advances in the field of Religious and Spiritual Psychology, in an objective manner without prejudice.

Also, it's essential that the professor is up to date with the latest scientific discoveries. As pointed out by Fondon, Madero and Sarmiento (2010), it is evident that research is not solely

for the purpose of the educator's scientific development, but also for maintaining his place as an academic scholar. Therefore, it's unthinkable to imagine a faculty member that isn't open to new investigations. Educators must be trained and constantly up to date with science's new developments; in this case, in the field of Religious and Spiritual Psychology.

Universities are centers of knowledge where freedom of ideas has to be a priority; the same goes for freedom of religion and beliefs. It's the place where new generations are developed and educated to become professionals who will play a fundamental role in society. If we understand this, then it's essential that educators be a true role model. Not only because of their qualifications, but also because of the

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous essay, we analyzed the formal education currently given to future psychologists, in what concerns Religious and Spiritual Psychology. Based on an overview of the scientific literature, it was found that there is an outstanding void in the education provided in universities, which is manifested by the lack of courses about the subject within the curriculum. Also, there isn't a solid integral education, which is shown in full display by the results obtained in various investigations.

On the other hand, the attitude taken by the teachers in charge of educating future psychologists was found flawed. They don't approach subjects related to Religious and Spiritual Psychology in a clear, objective, critical and rigorous manner. This is mostly due to stereotypes, prejudice and lack of

knowledge about the new research regarding those subjects.

Based on recent scientific findings, it is evident that this field in psychology is relevant in a future psychologist's education; in making sure they are prepared to fulfill their professional duties. It's essential that universities' curriculums be revised with the purpose of identifying the gaps in their education and implementing the necessary measures to improve their deficiencies.

It's vital that future psychologists assume the spiritual and religious dimension as part of human development, in order to be prepared in facing how variables such as faith in God, spiritual wellbeing, beliefs, convictions, spiritual necessities, methods of coping, spiritual perspectives, among other aspects, affect an essential part of human development.

Undoubtedly every psychologist, whichever his or her sexual orientation may be, works with people's intimacy; with their thoughts, feelings, values, attitudes, beliefs, among other things. Therefore it's vital that he, despite his beliefs and personal convictions, is capable of treating people's religious and spiritual reality with respect, liberty and tolerance.

Evidently, the conclusions this essay has reached are proximate, due to the fact that there still needs to be more empirical and meta-analytical studies about the education psychology students receive, and the attitude taken by their professors.

Accordingly, further research needs to be done within the field of Religious and Spiritual Psychology, with the purpose of not only knowing more about the subject, but also

knowing more about human nature. Also, to reevaluate the way future psychologists are educated, and to know which are the tools needed to respond to the challenges humanity currently faces.

The challenge we currently face is to know how to educate future psychologists in a rigorous and objective manner. Therefore, it is critical that stereotypes and prejudices on the influence of religion and spirituality in Latin American nations be left aside. Once this is accomplished, we will be able to develop research with all the dedication that science demands, with the purpose of expanding horizons, clarifying realities and leaving myths behind.

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