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Do spirituality and religiousness matter? exploring the effects of religiousness and spirituality on traumatic stress symptoms.

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Abstract

South Africa has a very high trauma exposure rate with reported lifetime estimates as high as 94%. Estimates of posttraumatic distress in this population have been as high as 26%, suggesting that a large portion of the population may be at risk for PTSD. Research suggests that certain factors, such as cognitive styles or beliefs, may buffer the effects of trauma and reduce the risk of developing PTSD. Literature has explored religiousness and spirituality but has yielded mixed findings. The present study aimed to explore whether or not religiousness and spirituality independently function as moderators of posttraumatic stress symptoms (PTSS) in the South African population. A secondary aim was to explore the nature of the relation between spirituality and religiousness as some proponents have conceptualised them as synonymous, while others assert that they are different constructs. Results suggested that while religiousness was not a moderator of PTSS in the present sample, spirituality was a significant moderator. In addition, correlation analyses suggested that religiousness and spirituality may be two distinct constructs and perhaps should not be operationalised as synonymous. Implications of the findings and directions for future research are discussed.