Exploring religion's influence on causing emotional distress: A case report of a patient with Hinduism beliefs

I Ketut Arya Santosa
Psychiatrist of Bali Provincial Mental Hospital, Bali, Indonesia
Corresponding author email: drarya.rsjbali@gmail.com

Michael Surya
Resident Doctor of Psychiatric Specialist Education Program, Ngoerah Hospital & Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia

Komang Ana Mahardika
Resident Doctor of Psychiatric Specialist Education Program, Ngoerah Hospital & Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia

Rini Trisnowati
Resident Doctor of Psychiatric Specialist Education Program, Ngoerah Hospital & Udayana University, Denpasar, Indonesia

Abstract---*While Hinduism offers many positive teachings and practices that promote well-being, certain interpretations and pressures within the religion—such as rigid social hierarchies, religious guilt, and community pressure—can also contribute to feelings of isolation, low self-worth, and anxiety. Cultural pressures and gender-specific roles within Hindu families can also significantly impact mental health, particularly for married Hindu women who face the dual responsibilities of managing household chores and fulfilling religious obligations. These expectations to raise children, participate in daily prayers, and uphold familial honor can lead to emotional and psychological overwhelm, resulting in heightened stress levels and decreased mental well-being. It is essential to recognize that the effects of these pressures vary widely based on individual experiences, family dynamics, and personal beliefs. By emphasizing flexibility, inclusivity, and mental health awareness within Hindu communities, we can help mitigate these negative impacts and foster a supportive environment where individuals can balance spiritual practices with their well-being.*
Keywords---*emotional distress, Hinduism beliefs, religion, patient.*

Introduction

History has proven for a long time that there is an ambivalent relationship between religion and mental well-being. Recent discussions support the idea that understanding various religious beliefs and mental health can enhance clinical work and psychotherapy (Smolak et al., 2013). On one hand, individuals who engage in religious practices often exhibit better mental health outcomes, suggesting that spirituality can play a supportive role in coping with mental health challenges (Smolak et al., 2013; Ibrahim & Whitley, 2021). Religion also can contribute positively to emotional well-being and coping mechanisms, serving as effective strategies for managing mental health issues, and emphasizing the importance of integrating spiritual beliefs into therapeutic practices (Ibrahim & Whitley, 2021).

While some sources support the idea that religion provides relief for clients, others argue that negative religious coping and struggles can lead to various mental disorders, including anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder (Koenig et al., 2020). Certain religious beliefs can also contribute to mental health stigma, particularly in the context

of supernatural explanations for mental illness (Koenig et al., 2020; Ghuloum et al., 2024). In other parts of the world, for example, Eastern Mediterranean region, religion attributes mental health issues to supernatural causes such as punishment from God (Ghuloum et al., 2024).

Hinduism is the religion with the largest number of adherents in Bali, where traditional cultures and beliefs are deeply integrated into daily life (Ardhana & Wijaya, 2017). Although Hinduism, like any other religion, can provide hope and comfort to its followers, it can also cause emotional distress (Levin, 1996; Pomfret et al., 2018). In this case report, we describe a patient with Hinduism religious beliefs from Bali, whose psychopathology was influenced by his religious and cultural beliefs (Lee et al., 2015; Kirmayer, 1989; Johnson et al., 2017).

Case Illustration

The patient is a 55-year-old man, who practices Hinduism, works as a tour guide, and comes from a family that adheres to religious teachings. 4 months before being taken to the hospital, the patient was asked to serve his place of worship as a representative of the religious leader. The patient then experienced stress because he objected to the request, which caused a relapse of mental disorders (Krupat et al., 2000; Castro et al., 2016). The patient admitted that he felt beaten when praying at the place of prayer. The patient also heard voices saying that he was useless and that it would be better to die. In the end, the patient also sent people around him to harm him because he refused to be appointed to serve at the place of worship. The patient felt that he was being punished for the sin of refusing to serve at the place of worship. The patient still recognized the people around him but sent those people to view him with a bad paradigm (Allegranzi et al., 2009).

Discussion

While Hinduism is often viewed as a source of peace, spiritual growth, and a guiding moral compass, like any other belief system, it can have aspects that may impact an individual's mental state negatively if practiced or interpreted in certain ways (Thomas, 1992; Puchalski & O'Donnell, 2005). In many Hindu communities, there is a strong emphasis on reputation and social status, which may lead to fear of judgment (Koenig et al., 2020). Individuals may feel pressured to conform to community standards, sometimes suppressing their true selves in the process (Koenig et al., 2020; Arif & Olagoke, 2024). Those who deviate from religious or social norms may face ostracism or judgment, which can lead to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and even depression (Arif & Olagoke, 2024). Young people, especially, may experience heightened stress from trying to balance personal desires with the expectations of family and society, leading to emotional distress (Koenig et al., 2020; Arif & Olagoke, 2024).

Hinduism has been associated with a caste system, a social structure dividing people into rigid hereditary classes (Johri & Anand, 2022; Gupta & Coffey, 2020). Although modern Hindu society is increasingly progressive, the remnants of the caste system still impact people's lives. Those from lower castes often face social discrimination, exclusion, and lack of opportunity, which can contribute to feelings of worthlessness, depression, and low self-esteem (Johri & Anand, 2022). Such institutionalized discrimination can also result in isolation, perpetuating cycles of poverty and reducing access to mental health resources (Gupta & Coffey, 2020). These structural barriers lead to pervasive mental distress, with people from lower castes experiencing depression at significantly higher rates than national averages. Even those in higher castes can feel the negative effects (Johri & Anand, 2022). The pressure to conform to societal roles or maintain "purity" within certain castes can add stress and limit personal choices, impacting one's sense of freedom and mental well-being (Johri & Anand, 2022).

The Hindu concept of karma suggests that one's actions determine their future experiences, both in this life and in reincarnated lives (Arif & Olagoke, 2024). While this can be empowering, some interpretations can lead to excessive self-blame. For instance, people facing misfortunes, illnesses, or difficulties might be led to believe that their suffering is a result of past-life sins or faults, leading to guilt and self-loathing (Jacob et al., 2023). Mental illness, which is sometimes attributed to a lack of faith or inadequate adherence to rituals, can create immense pressure on individuals struggling with mental health issues, leading them to feel guilty or ashamed about their condition (Arif & Olagoke, 2024; Jacob et al., 2023).

This belief may discourage individuals from seeking solutions to problems, such as seeking professional help for mental health issues (Jacob et al., 2023). This perspective can also exacerbate feelings of isolation and low self-esteem and end up seeing suffering as unavoidable due to karma. Additionally, the belief in karma may also lead people to judge others' suffering as "deserved," potentially leading to a lack of empathy or creating further isolation for individuals facing adversity (Jacob et al., 2023). For example, the idea that "bad karma" leads to mental illness implies that the individual's actions in this life or past lives are responsible for their condition. This blame-oriented approach can perpetuate stigma and discourage individuals from seeking professional help (Jacob et al., 2023).

In some traditional interpretations of Hindu texts, gender roles are strictly defined, which may lead to restrictive expectations (Jacob et al., 2023). Women, for instance, might be expected to prioritize family and household duties, often sacrificing their aspirations or well-being in the process. For men, societal expectations might encourage being the primary earners and protectors, leading to feelings of inadequacy or guilt if they do not meet these standards. These gender expectations can create stress, anxiety, and a sense of unfulfillment, particularly for those who seek more flexible or non-traditional lifestyles (Jacob et al., 2023; Kang, 2010).

Hinduism's emphasis on purity and modesty, usually more defined on women, can lead to restrictions that foster feelings of shame or guilt surrounding normal human experiences, such as sexuality and bodily autonomy (Jacob et al., 2023; Kang, 2010). This can contribute to mental health issues related to self-worth and body image (Jacob et al., 2023). Married Hindu women also face significant stress due to their dual responsibilities—both domestic and religious (Kang, 2010). They are expected to manage household chores, raise children, participate actively in daily prayers and community events, and uphold familial honor. This multiplicity of obligations can overwhelm them emotionally and psychologically, contributing to heightened stress levels and decreased mental well-being (Jacob et al., 2023; Kang, 2010).

Some branches of Hinduism emphasize asceticism, encouraging followers to renounce worldly desires to reach higher spiritual states (DeNapoli, 2009). While this can be fulfilling for some, it may lead to internal conflict for others who struggle to reconcile spiritual goals with natural human desires for relationships, comfort, or material success (DeNapoli, 2009). Trying to adhere strictly to ascetic practices may create feelings of guilt or failure if individuals are unable to meet such ideals, which may contribute to anxiety and self-criticism (DeNapoli, 2009). Young people, in particular, may face pressure to balance their personal goals and desires with spiritual expectations from family members or communities, creating additional stress. If individuals feel unworthy or less spiritual due to their desires, it can harm their self-esteem and overall mental well-being (DeNapoli, 2009).

Conclusion

While Hinduism offers many positive teachings and practices that promote well-being, certain interpretations and pressures within the religion—such as rigid social hierarchies, religious guilt, and community pressure—can also contribute to feelings of isolation, low self-worth, and anxiety. Cultural pressures and gender-specific roles within Hindu families can also significantly impact mental health, particularly for married Hindu women who face the dual responsibilities of managing household chores and fulfilling religious obligations (Mediastari, 2020). These expectations to raise children, participate in daily prayers, and uphold familial honor can lead to emotional and psychological overwhelm, resulting in heightened stress levels and decreased mental well-being. It is essential to recognize that the effects of these pressures vary widely based on individual experiences, family dynamics, and personal beliefs. By emphasizing flexibility, inclusivity, and mental health awareness within Hindu communities, we can help mitigate these negative impacts and foster a supportive environment where individuals can balance spiritual practices with their well-being.

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