

The Role of Spirituality in the Practice of Employee Assistance Programs:

A South African Experience

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A quantitative study was carried out through an online survey (using Qualtrics) amongst South African EAP practitioners/ professionals in respect of their knowledge, attitudes and practices regarding spirituality when rendering EAP services. The survey link was distributed to a list of 232 EAP practitioners/ professionals as was obtained from the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa and to an additional 25 email addresses by using snowball sampling – totaling 257 respondents. A total of 57 completed responses were received (22% response rate). The respondents indicated positive attitudes towards spirituality, and reported that they frequently deal with spiritual matters in practice. However, respondents indicated uncertainty about their own knowledge of levels of spirituality and whether their training was adequate to guide them in good ethical practice.

Key words: spirituality, religion, spiritual wellness, social workers, psychologists

INTRODUCTION

Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) in the workplace, which first started as occupational alcohol treatment programs (Dickman & Challenger, 2009), have evolved into a more pro-

active approach for the prevention of certain psycho-social problems. EAPs thus embrace a holistic and preventative approach that focuses on employee wellness. Indeed, employers have increasingly recognized that employees who are healthy and happy are productive (Gornick & Blair, 2005:15; Herlihy & Attridge, 2005). Employee wellness incorporates aspects of physical, psycho-social, intellectual or mental, as well as spiritual wellness (Csiernik & Adams, 2002). However, the concept and practice of spirituality and spiritual wellness in the EAP context have not been sufficiently addressed, and only later became the focus of studies (Adams & Csiernik, 2002).

Spirituality has been neglected for a host of reasons, but mainly because empirical studies and open discussions about it in the workplace (and, by extension, in EAPs) are problematic (Csiernik & Adams 2002; Van Tonder & Ramdass, 2009). Yet, although difficult to apply in practice, Adams and Csiernik (2002) are of the opinion that spirituality in the workplace is an integral and overriding component to overcome other workplace challenges, such as change, overload and stress.

From an individual and counselling perspective, significant life events such as serious illness, divorce, lay-offs, death may raise profound and often disturbing questions about our place in the world and the purpose of life. These existential questions, which may trigger questions around the client's worldview and spirituality, often lead to feelings of powerlessness and a sense of finitude. Spirituality (or religion) is often a great source of coping (whether negatively or positively) in dealing with these profound questions, and helps people come to terms when they are feeling powerless or in need of solace, and produces new value and meaning when dreams need to be revisited. Accessing the client's spiritual resources greatly adds to the counsellor and therapist's tools in helping the client gain a sense of control (Pargament, Murray-Swank & Tarakeshwar, 2005).

Traditionally, spiritual care was provided to employees in the workplace in the form of pastoral care and chaplaincy, especially in the military, hospitals, police departments and fire departments. The focus of such spiritual care was predominantly for troubled employees during difficult times such as bereavement and trauma, but often also dealt with employees' secular difficulties. Concerns were raised, however, that employees who do not subscribe to the same belief systems as those provided by the chaplaincy or pastoral care services are excluded and may regard such clear workplace affiliation as prejudicial (Nimon, Philibert & Allen, 2008). Organizations, especially in the United States of America (USA), have responded to the complexities of religiosity and spirituality and try to find common ground by focusing on spirituality instead of religiosity in the hope of avoiding and preventing workplace conflicts (Lund Dean & Safranski, 2008; Mitroff & Denton, 1999; Schley, 2008). Spirituality itself is a multi-dimensional concept and has been the subject of research and discussion across many academic disciplines, for example in psychology, social work, nursing, occupational therapy and workplace leadership (Gall, Malette, & Guirguis-Younger, 2011). Spirituality can be defined as a broad concept which involves an active personal investment in transcendent beliefs and practices. Spirituality can be considered "the heart and soul" of religion – but can also be expressed outside formal religion as a personal faith by those who do not consider themselves religious (Walsh, 2010).

In the context of the holistic, wellness paradigm evolving within EAPs, with its focus on the promotion of health and well-being of employees, (Gornick & Blair, 2005) 'spirituality' is being reframed as, and expanded into, 'spiritual wellness', which is still an emerging concept. Spiritual wellness refers to the awareness of the spiritual dimension that forms part of a human's holistic health and wellness, and includes a sense of balance and openness to spiritual development (Chandler, Holden & Kolander, 1992; Watson, 2007). "Spiritual wellness represents the openness to the spiritual dimension that permits the integration of

one's spirituality with the other dimensions of life, thus maximizing the potential for growth and self-actualization" (Westgate, 1996:27).

Relevant to EAPs specifically, there has been a growing interest in spirituality and incorporating clients' spiritual needs in the social work sphere (Bhagwan, 2002; Carroll, 2001; Canda & Furman, 2010) as well as in the psychological practice domain (Pargament, Murray-Swank, & Tarakeshwar, 2005; Smith, Bartz, & Richards, 2007). Several surveys have been conducted amongst social workers and psychotherapists to gauge their own religious and spiritual affiliations and their attitudes towards incorporating spiritual matters into practice (e.g. Furman, Benson, Canda, & Grimwood, 2005; Hofmann & Wallach, 2011). The study of spirituality within the EAP context necessitates the inclusion of all these various perspectives in order to accommodate all the relevant aspects within a broad framework.

Although discussions about spirituality in the context of work, social work and psychotherapy have been rapidly increasing and literature abounds, the same cannot be said for how to specifically integrate spirituality in the EAP context. As Csiernik and Adams (2002) point out, spirituality has been, traditionally the most neglected aspect of wellness, although that is changing. Anecdotal evidence suggests that corporate clients are driving the agenda and development of EAP services to some extent. One of the identified needs is that of a spiritual component in the EAP/Employee Wellness offerings to clients. EAP providers find it difficult to position this without alienating various religious groupings. To date, however, aside from contributions by aforementioned authors such as Adams and Csiernik, the holistic application of spirituality and spiritual wellness in an EAP context has not yet been sufficiently studied. Further investigations and research into spiritual wellness within the EAP context should include and combine both the 'spirituality in the workplace' perspective and spirituality in the human services professions that provide services to employees in the workplace.

METHODOLOGY

A study was conducted, on which this article is based, to explore the knowledge, attitudes and practices among South African EAP professionals and practitioners in respect of spirituality (Van Wyk, 2016). A non-experimental quantitative design, namely a survey design, was used for the study to explore and describe a cross-section of EAP professionals and practitioners at one point in time (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). The data was collected by means of a self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed by the researchers and distributed using a web-based survey tool (i.e. Qualtrics) that the respondents accessed via a unique link and which was completed online.

The study population comprised of EAP professionals, practitioners and affiliates in South Africa, employed in the public sector, private sector, or as employees or affiliates of EAP providers. These EAP professionals, practitioners or affiliates comprise of, *inter alia*, social workers, psychologists, psychological counselors, pastoral counselors, EAP consultants, and EAP program managers. Since the size of the target population was not known, the researchers created a sampling frame of the population by approaching and sourcing from the Board of EAPA-SA its list of registered members in the EAP practice field, which reflects the larger research population. The respondents were differentiated in terms of their predominant job roles (e.g. psychologist or social worker); where they were employed; their age, gender, and population group.

As the list was small (238 email addresses, of which 232 were valid), no further sampling was carried out and an anonymous survey link to the web-based questionnaire was distributed to all the members on the list. The researchers had no control over the size of the sample – which was in fact the total population of members of the Employee Assistance Professionals Association of South Africa. The researchers, however, further conducted snowball sampling

amongst practitioners whose membership of EAPA-SA had not been renewed, but on recommendation of some of the active participants. Two (2) initial participants requested the further distribution of the survey link to other possible EAP practitioners and professionals not on the initial EAP-SA list but who nevertheless form part of the study population. In addition, one of the researchers approached other members of the study population who were known to her and requested referrals to possible participants who were not on the initial list. Such further distribution of the survey links was on condition that the researchers should be informed of the number of such distributions. Twenty-five (25) additional links to the online questionnaire were distributed. Out of the total of **257** (232 valid survey links plus 25 additional survey links) questionnaires distributed, **57** completed responses were received, with therefore a response rate of **22%**. Upon completion of the survey, the data was electronically received, collated, and statistically analyzed using the built-in statistical tool of the Qualtrics software program.

In constructing the questionnaire, accepted principles of questionnaire design were incorporated. As Delport and Roestenburg (2011) point out, a questionnaire is not expected to have been exposed to rigorous standardization procedures. However, during the construction of the questionnaire its reliability and validity (content and face) were considered and addressed by the researchers. The main objective was to assess the general tendencies in the EAP population and describe the respondents' relevant knowledge, attitudes, and practices using descriptive statistics.

The necessary precautionary actions were taken regarding ethical issues.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Demographic and general information data

The age of the EAP respondents stretched across the working life span from 20 years to older than 60 years. The largest age group was those between 40-49 years at 45%. However, 70% of respondents were older than 40 years and thus assumed to be professionally mature. It was therefore expected that their knowledge, attitudes and practices were informed by many years of life and work experience.

Females made up the majority of the respondents (77%), which may be representative of the underlying professional groups that make up the population of EAP professionals. In South Africa, the social work profession (which was well represented in the sample) has a strong female component. Bhagvan (2010) reports that the South Africa Council for Social Service Professions confirmed that from the total number of students who were registered with them at that time, 87% was female.

The majority of the respondents were Africans (61%), with Coloureds (a distinct ethnic group of mixed race in South Africa) at 18%, Whites 16% and Asians at 5%. The data on the population groups represented in the sample did not reflect the available demographical data for South Africa's population. Statistics South Africa's (2014) population estimates put Africans at 80% of the general population (instead of the sample group's 61%), Whites at approximately 8% (instead of the sample group's 16%), Asians at 2.5% (instead of the sample group's 5%) and Coloureds at approximately 9% (instead of the sample group's 18%). The White, Asian and Coloured population groups were over-represented. This can be attributed to the fact that, considering the relative mature age of the sample group, professional opportunities were not as accessible to the African population group prior to 1994 (when the new political dispensation was established in South Africa), and EAP practitioners' and professionals' demographics may reflect this reality.

Most of the respondents were employed in the public sector (81%). The rest of the respondents worked in the private sector, inter alia, as employees or affiliates of EAP service providers.

As to the predominant job role or function, 42% of the EAP practitioners and professionals indicated that they were social workers; 8% indicated that they were in a psychological, therapeutic or counseling role. The next significant group was the EAP managers or program coordinators (35%). Others included consultants in the EAP or occupational health practitioners. The balance between the social workers and program managers made the results, therefore, more relevant and less biased towards one specific practicing group.

There was strong support for the idea that a distinction should be made between religion and spirituality, with the majority of the respondents (83%) agreeing to some degree that a distinction should be made (60% 'strongly agree' and 23% 'somewhat agree'). Only 10% of the respondents disagreed with the statement (5% 'strongly disagreed' and 5% 'somewhat disagreed'); and 7% were unsure.

The respondents were asked to rate how important spirituality was in their lives. The data indicated that the respondents regarded their spirituality as important in their lives, with 89% rating it as 'very' to 'extremely important'. This result did not surprise as South Africa is a religious country, with approximately 85% of South Africans self-describing as having a religious affiliation and 15% indicating they were non-religious. This could include spirituality without religious affiliation as well as not having any interest in either religion or spiritual matters) (Statistics South Africa, 2001). The high religiosity highlights the fact that, in South Africa at least, discussions in the workplace and the EAP should be sensitive to the fact that people's spirituality is connected to and interwoven with their

religiosity, and care should be taken not to alienate religious groups when discussing spiritual matters.

Knowledge of spirituality in respect of EAP practice

Based on a literature review, several aspects and dimensions of spirituality as well as the derivative construct of spiritual wellness (which is important in the EAP context) were presented to the respondents as they were asked to indicate their preferences to the question ‘when I consider the idea of spiritual wellness, I think of....’. (Multiple responses were possible.)

The researchers wanted to ascertain whether the EAP community supported the underlying dimensions of spirituality set out in the literature as well as in their own formulation of spiritual wellness, i.e. the balanced, authentic expression and growth of spirituality. Table 1 shows the number of responses in agreement with the underlying dimensions, with some receiving more support than others.

From the responses it is evident that the respondents understood the construct of spirituality as explained at the start of the survey, because most of the responses scored high on the essential themes of the construct, such as ‘connection with the Divine/God’ (72%), ‘inner journey’ (44%), ‘growth process’ (42%), ‘purpose’ and ‘meaning’ (49% and 30% respectively).

Interestingly, there was not much support for the idea ‘search for the sacred’ (only 14%) which, for some scholars is the most important aspect of spirituality (Hill et al., 2000). Some support was found for ‘transcendence’ (21%) and ‘transformation’ (21%). These ideas may have been too abstract and devoid of context for the respondents to fully engage

Table 1. Dimensions of spiritual wellness.

No Answer		Response %	
1	An inner journey	25	44
2	Search for the sacred	8	14
3	Spiritual values (e.g., altruistic love, respect, integrity)	27	47
4	Balance	11	19
5	A growth process	24	42
6	Meaning	17	30
7	Transcendence (beyond myself)	12	21
8	Transformation	12	21
9	Authenticity	10	18
10	Ubuntu – care for one another	9	16
11	Purpose in life	28	49
12	Connection with the Divine/God	41	72
13	Connection with others	18	32
14	Honoring the ancestors	8	14
15	Other, please specify	2	4

with them (or they may have been implicit in the other choices that they made). There was strong support for the practical or lived experiences of spirituality: ‘(S)piritual values’ (47%) and ‘connection to others’ (32%) were rated quite high. Considering the large proportion of African respondents, there was not much support for traditional African spiritual concepts such as ‘ubuntu’ (only 21% of the African respondents) and ‘honoring the ancestors’ (only 24% of the African respondents).

Ubuntu values, which permeate every aspect of African lives, is best encapsulated by the Xhosa proverb *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu* which means ‘I am because we are’. I am only a person through others. These values are expressed in the collective cultural practices and rituals, effort in work, and worship (Mbigi, 1997). The lack of support might have been that the respondents construed ubuntu in social-cultural rather than spiritual terms. In the case of ‘honoring the ancestors’, the lack of support may be due to the fact that South Africans (and Africans in this sample) are mostly Christian (79%) (Statistics South Africa, 2001), which may or may not include some traditional African spiritual notions as “[r]eligion in Africa is complex and multifaceted” (Bhagwan, 2010:193).

With the exception of the idea of ‘spiritual growth’ which was ranked moderately high (42%), there was not much support for wellness concepts such as ‘balance’ (19%) and ‘authenticity’ (18%). Since the question was phrased as spiritual *wellness*, it was quite surprising that these wellness concepts – which are important in the EAP context – were not selected. The respondents might have based their ideas on their own personal experiences and conceptualizations rather than on what these concepts may mean in EAP practice.

Some of the respondents provided additional responses under the option ‘Other ... please specify’: (a) the basis for norms and values, grounding (knowing your roots, knowing

where you come from), understanding the impact of your past in defining your journey and spiritual wellness; and (b) my relationship with Jesus.

In the next section, the respondents were then asked to assess their knowledge in respect of spirituality in their EAP practices in three related questions based on a 5 point Likert-type scale, ranging from 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'uncertain', 'agree' to 'strongly agree'. (Figure 1). The first question dealt with the importance that they attached to such knowledge.

There was overwhelming support (93%) for the statement that it is important that EAP practitioners have knowledge about diverse spiritual beliefs and practices'. Only 2% of the respondents disagreed that it is important and 5% were uncertain. However, despite the importance that the respondents attributed to that knowledge, when asked to rate their knowledge about such matters (including training they received), the discrepancy between the importance that they ideally attached to the matter and their own practical experience was highlighted. Only 44% of the respondents agreed (16% 'strongly agreed') that they had the skills to assist their clients in diverse spiritual matters; 34% disagreed to some degree. A relatively large group (23%) was uncertain whether they had the skills. The majority of the respondents were therefore not convinced that they had the necessary skills.

The lack of knowledge and skills may be attributed to lack of training: Only 34% of the respondents agreed that they had received adequate training to deal with spiritual matters with clients, and 46% said they had not received adequate training to assist clients in spiritual matters. Since a large proportion of the sample group included social workers, a

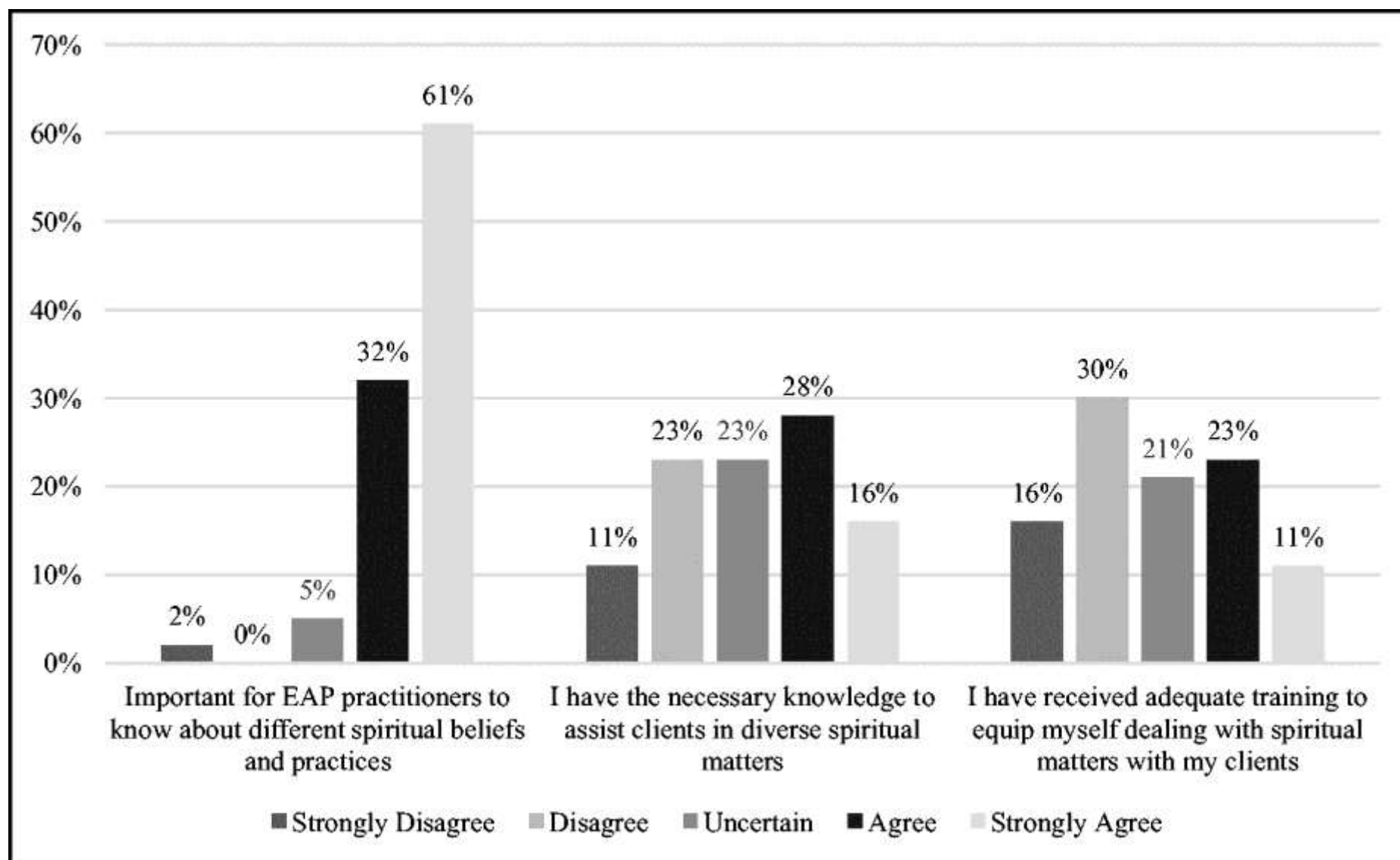


Figure 1. Knowledge about spiritual beliefs and practices ($N = 57$).

study by Bhagvan (2010) may be relevant because South African social work students reported that spirituality as a topic received minimal or no attention during their training: Thirty-six per cent (36%) indicated that the topic was ‘sometimes’ addressed and only 11% said that such content was ‘often covered’. In effect, only 47% had received training to some extent.

This absence in the curriculum is not only applicable to South Africa. Furman, Benson, Canda and Grimwood (2005) reported that surveys conducted among social workers in the US and UK revealed that 73% (in the US) and 76% (in the UK) of the respondents indicated that religion/spirituality had not been covered in their education. From these findings, it also appears that although social workers realize the importance of religion and spirituality, many practitioners do not feel adequately prepared to address the subject. The lack of training is also a concern in the psychological field (Barnett & Jonson, 2011; Luckoff, 1998). Similar to the results above, Morrison, Clutter, Pritchett and Demmitt (2009) reported on studies they conducted among psychological counselors that showed that the majority of counselors, although recognizing the importance of integrating spirituality into counseling, did not feel adequately competent to address these issues in practice with their clients. This has important implications for EAP professionals and practitioners since the data that follows shows that they believe that spiritual matters should be accommodated, and, in fact, they *do* incorporate spiritual advice in their practice despite not feeling adequately equipped to do so.

Attitudes about spirituality in EAP practice

Considering attitudes towards spirituality in the EAP and workplace contexts, the respondents were asked firstly about their levels of agreement with a negatively framed statement that ‘spirituality should fall outside the scope of EAP practice’ (Figure 2).

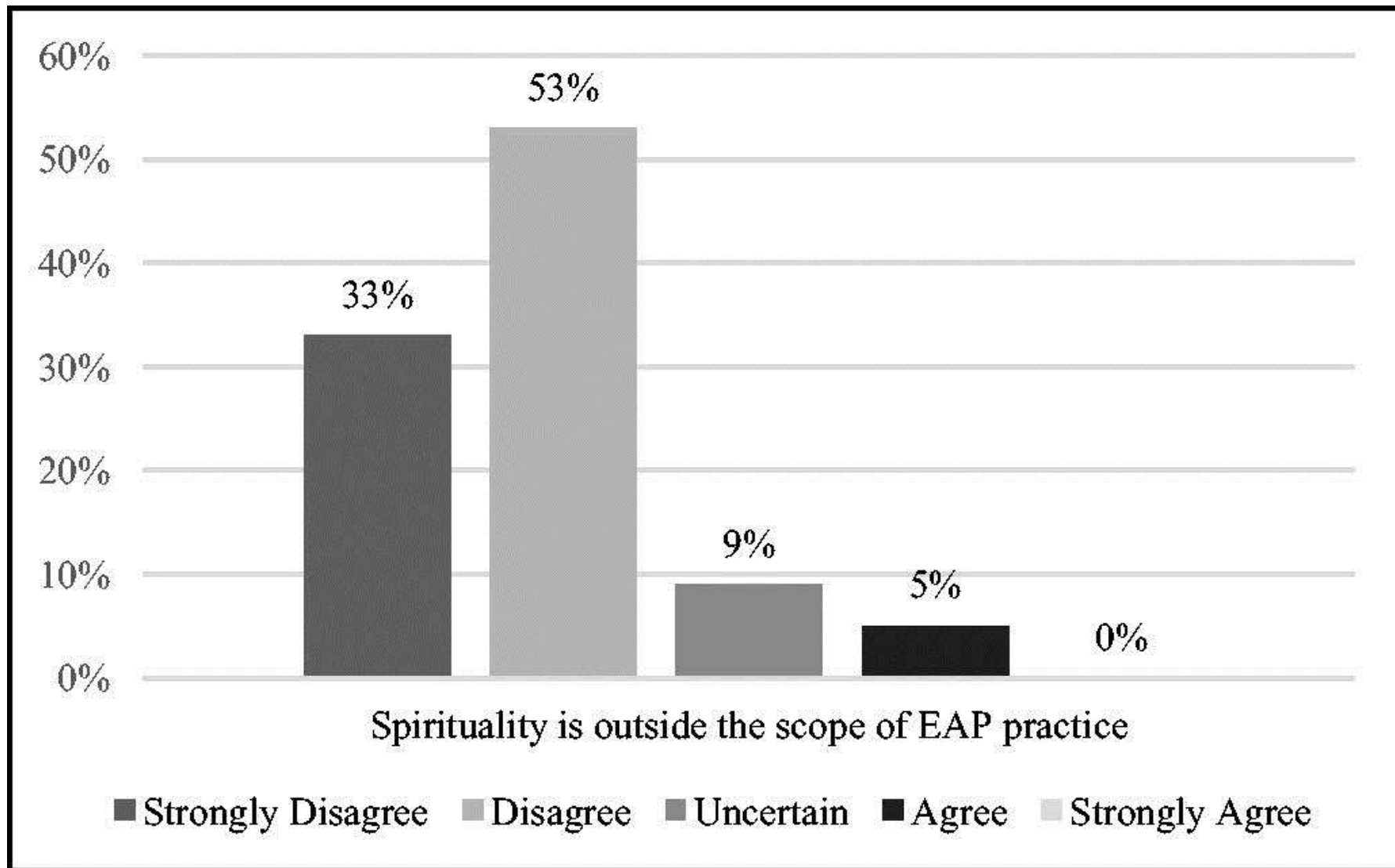


Figure 2. Spirituality outside the scope of Employee Assistance Program practice ($N = 57$).

Of the respondents, 86% disagreed with the statement that ‘spirituality should be outside the scope of EAP practice’. Only 5% agreed that spirituality falls outside the scope of EAP practice.

Respondents were asked to rate their comfort level when discussing spirituality with their clients by indicating their level of agreement with the statement ‘I am comfortable discussing spiritual matters with my clients’. In keeping with the respondents’ positive attitudes towards spiritual matters in the EAP context, 85% of the respondents indicated that they were comfortable to some degree discussing spiritual matters. Only 4% indicated feeling discomfort when talking about spiritual matters; and 12% indicated that they ‘neither agree nor disagree’. (Due to rounding, totals do not equal 100%).

Considering the positive attitudes to spiritual matters in general, when respondents were asked about the importance of spirituality to their clients, their answers were not surprising. They were asked to indicate their level of agreement with the statements ‘people’s spiritual beliefs help them cope during difficult times’, and ‘spiritual growth is important to my clients’. A large number of the respondents (91%) agreed to some degree that people’s spiritual beliefs help them to cope during difficult times; 81% agreed to some extent that spiritual growth was important to their clients. Somewhat surprisingly, further analysis and comparison between the therapeutic group (social workers, psychologists, and pastoral counselors) and the program manager/coordinator group showed support in both groups for the abovementioned statements. To illustrate: 90% in the management/coordinator group

agreed to some degree that spirituality helped their clients to cope; and 80% agreed to some degree with the statement ‘Spiritual growth is important to my clients’.

Spirituality was therefore important both to individuals on a micro level and to clients on a macro or corporate level. This confirms the anecdotal evidence raised earlier that discussions on spirituality in EAP and the workplace are often driven by corporate clients who wish to accommodate these matters in their environments, and EAP program managers/coordinators who may want to respond to such requests.

Respondents were then asked about their approach to counseling clients and were asked to pick any of the three options: ‘I cannot work with clients who have different spiritual beliefs to what I have and will likely influence them to believe as I do’; ‘I can work with clients having different beliefs to what I have and respect their beliefs’, and ‘I am uncertain’.

The vast majority (95%) indicated that they could (hypothetically, especially in the case of respondents who were not in therapeutic practice) work with people who had different beliefs to theirs. Only 2% indicated inability to do so and 4% was uncertain. (Due to rounding, totals do not equal 100%). From the responses, it can be deduced that the respondents most likely would follow a pluralist approach which can accommodate multiple and diverse religious and spiritual realities (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2000). The responses also indicate that they would not (or at least they were aware that they should not) influence or convert their clients to their own belief systems as this may have ethical implications. South African EAP professionals and practitioners seem to be very tolerant of religious and spiritual diversity, which may confirm Du Plessis’ (2001:439) statement that “(r)eligious pluralism, in and of itself, has never been a major source of inter-individual and inter-group intolerance” in South Africa; it only becomes relevant when racial or ethnic

conflict, class tension and political strife find expression in the religious life of South Africans.

Practices in respect of spirituality

The next section of the questionnaire focused on the respondents' EAP practices.

Respondents were asked to indicate a level of frequency (on 4 point Likert-type scale, ranging from 'never', 'occasionally', 'very often' to 'always') that spiritual matters are raised in practice. Clients themselves seem to raise spiritual issues in practice, as is evident from the responses to the following statements: 'Clients discuss spiritual matters and problems with me' (42% 'occasionally', 46% 'very often', and 12% 'always'). The frequency at which these matters are raised in practice is surprising; importantly, none of the respondents indicated that spirituality is *never* discussed. Therefore, EAP practitioners and professionals have no choice but to deal with spiritual matters in practice. The answers to the following question (as in Figure 3) reflect the EAP practitioners and professionals' responses to these matters. The strongest level of frequency of incorporating these issues is reflected by 'occasionally' (46%).

The responses of the EAP practitioners or professionals who were confronted by clients who wanted to discuss spiritual matters were incongruent in respect of what the clients wanted to discuss and their responses to the clients. There were respondents who 'never' (9%) dealt with these matters in practice. The relatively low rate of incorporating these matters in practice may be due, at least partly, to the respondents' feelings of inadequacy in dealing with spiritual matters despite understanding the importance thereof and their

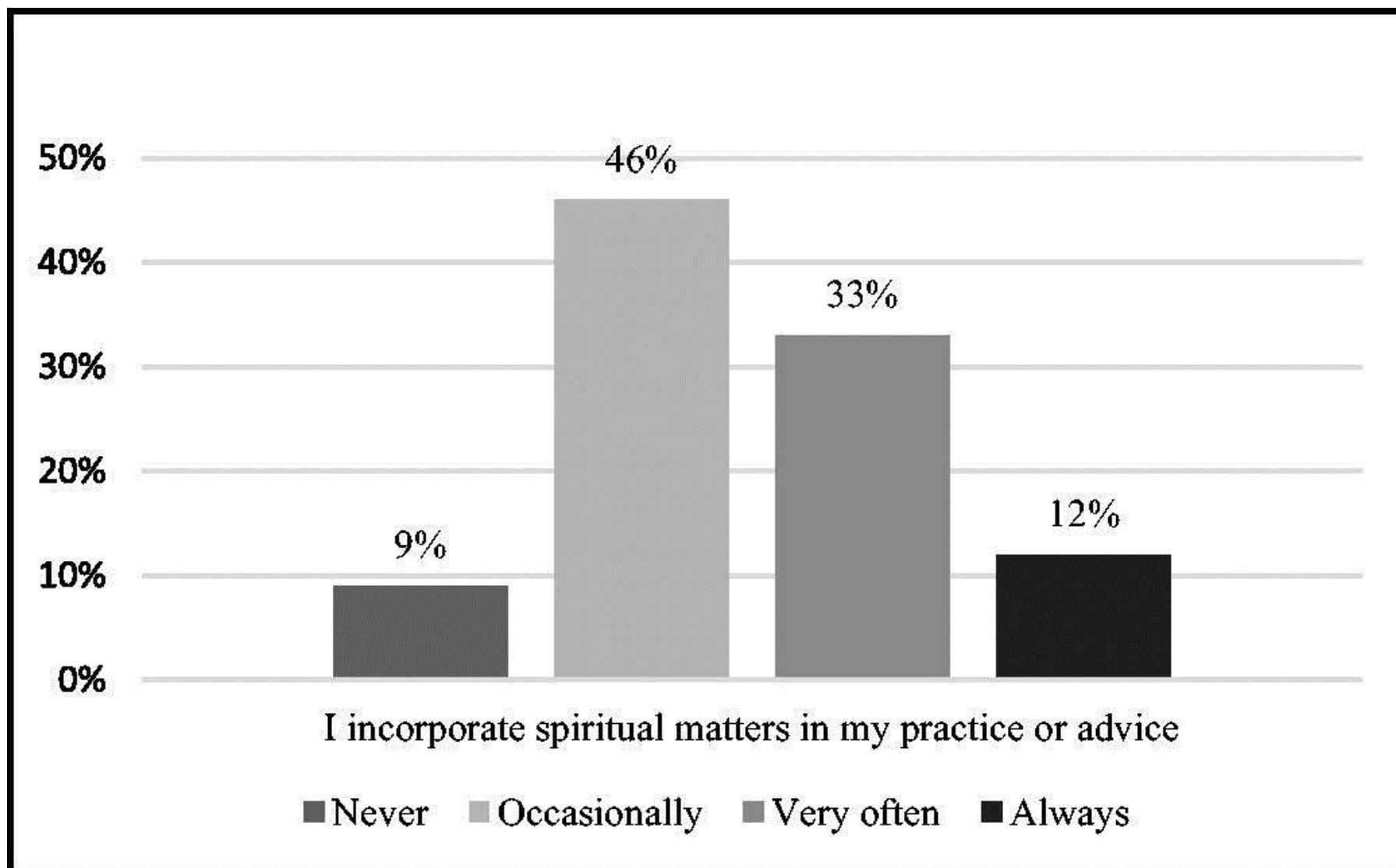


Figure 3. Incorporation of spiritual matters into practice ($N = 57$).

generally positive attitudes towards these matters. This confirms Gilbert's (2000) findings that counselors frequently find themselves addressing these issues in practice despite the lack of training.

Based on a literature survey, the respondents were presented with options (Table 2) to decide under which circumstances it would be appropriate to include spirituality in discussions with their clients. Multiple responses were possible.

The respondents agreed with all the options and most were in favor of scenarios dealing with "...loss, chaos and crisis", confirming Furman et al.'s (2005) finding on surveys conducted among social workers in the US and UK that religion and spirituality can be especially beneficial in these practice areas. As in the case of the Furman et al study (2005), support was found for serious or terminal illness (61% compared to 75% in Furman et al.'s study) and for suffering as a result of a natural disaster or trauma (56% compared to 55% in Furman et al.'s study); the strongest support was for times of bereavement (82% compared to 74% in Furman et al.'s study). What was surprising though, considering the strong focus on the 'troubled employee' (Van Wyk, 2016), was the relatively low support (39% in both cases) for the scenarios involving substance abuse and HIV and Aids in the EAP context. Other options provided by the respondents were divorce, developing life skills and skills for personal growth, work-related problems and (more broadly) any situation where it is relevant to the client. Barnett and Johnson (2011) confirm that "...for many clients, religion and spirituality are essential aspects of their self, worldview, and belief system".

Table 2. Spirituality in appropriate Employee Assistance Program-related scenarios.

No	Answer	Response %	
1	Substance abuse	22	39
2	HIV/AIDS	22	39
3	Programs that focus on spiritual growth and spiritual wellness	40	70
4	Dealing with stress	32	56
5	Loss and bereavement	47	82
6	Serious illness	35	61
7	Trauma/critical incident	32	56
8	Other, please specify	10	18

However, in keeping with EAPs' strong focus on prevention and wellness initiatives, it is not surprising that there was strong support for spiritual wellness programs (70%). Nevertheless, such strong support may also indicate that it would be the most, or indeed the only, appropriate scenario for discussions on spiritual matters.

CONCLUSION

To date, the EAP literature and profession have given limited attention to spirituality in the EAP context. This empirical study provides a broad overview of current knowledge levels on and attitudes to spirituality, and the practices in respect thereof.

The EAP practitioners and professionals rated the importance of having knowledge about different spiritual beliefs and practices quite high. However, when asked whether they had the necessary knowledge to assist clients in this regard, less than half of the respondents agreed that they had the necessary skills and a similar number indicated that they had not received adequate training to prepare them to deal with spiritual matters in practice. The lack of knowledge and adequate preparation has implications for their individual practices and may hamper their efforts to incorporate it in practice. If professionals and practitioners are not adequately equipped to deal with these matters – and are unsure of possible dialogues, assessments, and interventions which may be required within their practices – it may also have ethical implications when ill-informed or inappropriate solutions are imposed on clients. Furthermore, EAP practitioners and professionals may simply not be aware of the possible scope for spiritual matters in their own practices and in the workplace in general.

Despite their lack of knowledge on such matters, the respondents were very positive about the incorporation of spiritual matters into their EAP practices and in the workplace in general. They were very comfortable discussing spiritual matters with their clients. The respondents

also indicated that they were comfortable when dealing with or counseling clients from diverse spiritual backgrounds, even when it differed from their own.

Matters relating to spirituality are frequently initiated by clients. In fact, none of the respondents indicated that these matters were 'never' raised by clients. However, here the lack of knowledge about the practical incorporation of such matters may be evident as there is a discrepancy between the frequency of these matters raised by clients, and relatively lower rates when the practitioners and professionals respond to these requests. However, the EAP practitioners and professionals indicated that there was a high degree or frequency of referring clients to appropriate spiritual resources.

The data raises the possibility that spirituality may already be imbedded in EAP practice, but perhaps with a limited scope.

There are limitations to this study: The use of non-probability sampling methods and especially the low response rate of 22% require caution as the results obtained from the survey may not likely be representative of the EAP practitioner and professional population and as such cannot be generalized to the whole EAP population. Furthermore, it may well have been that respondents to the survey were biased in a positive direction as they self-selected their participation in the study due to their positive feelings about the topic of spirituality. Therefore the risk exists in this empirical study that only those who were positive about spirituality as a topic participated in the survey. Related to the self-selection bias is the fact that it is quite possible that, because respondents felt positive about the topic, they were inclined to introduce a response bias in the form of a 'halo effect' and rated the importance and applicability of spirituality in their EAP practices quite high (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). However, since the respondents are derived from the South African population which is a

very religious nation, it is impossible to say with any accuracy if, and to what extent such biases did in fact exist.

Despite these limitations, this research opens up new possibilities for the accommodation of spirituality in the EAP context and the role that EAP professionals and practitioners can play in fostering this dimension of human well-being. This study, although limited, introduces a possible conversation on how to incorporate spirituality in EAP practice to best serve our clients. Certainly, strides have been made to introduce spirituality in the training of professionals (e.g. in the case of social workers Bhagvan, 2002; Canda & Furman, 2010). This study further raises important questions that could be answered by future research. It is therefore proposed that further qualitative studies should be conducted among EAP practitioners and professionals to probe in-depth the issues highlighted in the current study, for example, their levels of knowledge in respect of spiritual beliefs, details about their current practices (dialogues and interventions) and their awareness of the ethical implications for their practice. Furthermore, this study focused only on the South African context, where there is a high level of religiosity among the general population. It is proposed that similar surveys be conducted in other countries where the religious demographics are likely to be different.

Finally, it is the hope of the researchers, in raising these pertinent questions, that spirituality, as a concept and a practice, no longer be ignored in the EAP context.

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