ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to study closely the influence of spirituality on attitude towards death among people who find themselves in a situation of proximity to death. Due to the fact that spirituality proves to be a significant factor influencing the process of accepting death, increasing attention is paid nowadays to the spiritual component of personality and to saturation of its spiritual needs. Spirituality is understood in a broader sense as relation towards sanctity of either a religious or an irreligious person. Another aspect is the means by which the person comes to terms with own spirituality, whether it is intrinsic and becomes the goal of the person's life-long endeavour, or it can be described as extrinsic because it does not permeate his or her everyday reality. Spiritual orientation of a person is projected into his or her values and goals, it determines the way towards the meaning of life, which exceeds the person proper. V. E. Frankl speaks about reaching the meaning of life through self-transcendence by way of realization of values of creation, experiences and attitudes. A pronounced element of spirituality and attitude towards death is the belief in life after death, be it literal or symbolic, with reference to Terror Management Theory or Meaning Management Theory. To evaluate the attitude towards death we use the concept of the five stages of grief developed by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross based on her clinical experiences, and the theory of Wong, Reker and Gesser, the authors of Death Attitude Profile Revised questionnaire.

The facts under discussion are further empirically studied in a research amongst recipients of hospice and palliative care. Eleven patients from Dobrý Pastýř v Čerčanech and Svatý Štěpán v Litoměřicích hospices participated in the research in April - October 2012. Semi-structured interviews were used to map the spiritual area of the patients' lives; the questions dealt with their speculations about death, while their actual attitudes towards death were drawn indirectly from the context of the whole interview. The fact is that the attitudes toward death do not come only from the cognitive level, but also from the emotional level, and the actual experiences of respondents may be explicitly denied. It is also important to take into consideration other factors that impact the formation of a person's attitude towards death.

The conclusions of the study can be used to increase the quality of assisting services, especially in institutions whose primary role is not hospice care, but whose clients can be persons with severe, terminal illnesses. However thinking about the problems of life and death and about the spiritual area of life can be beneficial for every potential reader.
Key words: religious and nonreligious spirituality, religion, meaning of life, dying and death, death attitudes, fear of death, belief in afterlife