Chapter 10
Religiosity and Attitude in the Face of Death in Brazilian Elderly

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ABSTRACT

This chapter investigated possible links between religious motivations, attitudes, and coping in the face of death in Brazil. The participants included 478 people aged between 41 and 100 years, most of them women (77.82%). It employed the religious orientation scale (31 items), religious coping scale (33 items), and scale of attitudes in the face of death (46 items). Data were analyzed by means Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (Pearson), analysis of variance (ANOVA), exploratory factor analysis and internal consistency analysis (Cronbach’s alpha). The overall survey results are presented in two large blocks. The first describes the correlations between the factors of religious coping, religious orientation, and attitudes in the face of death. The second presents the relationship between elderly’s socio-biographical characteristics (age, income, education, gender, religion, and marital status), guidance and religious coping factors, and attitudes in the face of death. Finally, the authors discuss the results and their implications for the elderly.

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Every day I try to support
my own renewed personality,
plummeting into me all that is old and dead.
—Cora Coralina (1993, p. 76)

Death is not extinguishing the light;
it is only putting out the lamp
because the dawn has come
—Rabindranath Tagore (n.d.)

INTRODUCTION

Living and dying are two sides of the same coin called life. However, in the contemporary Western context, the most common trend has been to deny death, as if it were contrary to a revitalized and healthy existence. Several historians have pointed this out—among them Philippe Ariès (1977)—and several thanatologists, such as Kübler-Ross (1969) and Ziegler (1973). Studies developed in the Brazilian context have pointed out some of its vicissitudes (Medeiros, 1983; Torres, Guedes, Torres & Ebert, 1989; Pitta, 2003; Freitas Silva, 1991; Kovács, 2012; Barbosa & Freitas, 2009; Py, Trein, Oliveira & Azevedo, 2004; Py, 2013; Vianna, Loureiro & Alves, 2012; Freitas & Martins, 2014).

Faced with this reality, it is interesting to see how the elderly, inserted into this society that denies death, react to the perspective of the finiteness of life, which they get closer to encountering as their chronological age advances. In a country of religious tradition, like Brazil, it is relevant to investigate the role of religiosity in this process. The work presented in this chapter aims to contribute in this direction, approaching religiosity and attitude toward death in elderly residents in the city of Brasilia, capital of the country. We initially present a brief background of the elderly in the Brazilian reality, and specifically in the Brazilian Federal District (DF), followed by presentation of the concepts used in this study. Then we describe the survey, methodology, and results, followed by a brief discussion and conclusions.

THE ELDERLY IN BRAZIL AND IN THE FEDERAL DISTRICT

The elderly population has increased significantly, both worldwide and in Brazil. This increase constitutes one of the most significant demographic changes in recent decades. Results of a descriptive study by Vasconcelos and Gomes (2012) point out that since 1950, declines in mortality rates, birth, and fertility characterized the Brazilian demographic transition process, so that the age structure started its aging process. They also indicate that such changes did not occur simultaneously or evenly in the major regions of Brazil. The Southeast, South, and Midwest Regions (the latter including the Federal District or DF) are far more advanced in the process, while the North and Northeast regions maintain higher mortality and fecundity levels, and age structures that are less aged.

According to the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE) (2017), from its projection system of the resident population in Brazil (adjusted every second), the Brazilian population in mid-2017 is approximately 208 million people, of which 8.46% is over 65 years of age (3.64% male and 4.82% female). This proportion is expected to grow to about 59% by 2030. This increase in the elderly
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