



Defining the Meaning of Spirituality Through a Qualitative Case Study of Sheltered Homeless Women

Rates of homelessness in the United States are higher than those in other industrialized countries (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013; National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Between 2011 and 2012, the number of individuals in homeless families increased by 1.4% (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2013), with most homeless families (71%) headed by women (National Center on Family Homelessness, 2011). Women who are homeless face a multitude of physical and mental health challenges (Chin, Sullivan, & Wilson, 2011; Finfgeld-Connett, 2010; Schanzer, Dominguez, Shrout, & Caton, 2007). Research has suggested that spirituality may help to mitigate the stresses and negative effects of homelessness for women (Hurlbut, Robbins, & Hoke, 2011; Moxley, Washington, & Calligan, 2012; Walsh & Gulbrandsen, 2014). However, there have been relatively few studies that have explored the meaning of spirituality in the lives of homeless women and fewer studies that have focused on asking homeless women how they specifically define spirituality and about their experiences relating to spirituality.

Abstract: The primary purpose of this case study was to assess the meaning of spirituality in a convenience sample of women located in an urban city in the south-west United States. The secondary purpose was to describe their lived experiences associated with spirituality. From these interviews five themes emerged: *Belief in God or a Higher Power*, *Distinction Between Religion and Spirituality*, *Belief That There Is a Plan for Their Lives*, *Spirituality Providing Guidance for What Is Right/Wrong*, and *Belief That Their Lives Will Improve*. These findings support the perceived fundamental importance of spirituality in the lives of homeless women. Nurses and other clinicians can use this information to develop interventions to help support women using spirituality practices and to help improve the outlook of homelessness for these women. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.nwh.2015.12.004>

Keywords: homelessness | qualitative case study | spirituality | women's health

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