



Tailored Spiritual Support for the Aging Population: Developing a Model for Religious Counseling in Long-Term Care Facilities

Jennifer Akello Owot ^{1*}, Cyril Enahoro Imohiosen ², Sam David Ukpo ³, Pius Ajuluchukwu ⁴

¹ School of Nursing, the University of Akron, Ohio USA

² Palm Beach Atlantic University, Florida, USA

³ Independent Researcher, NJ, USA

⁴ Independent Researcher, Columbus, Ohio, USA

* Corresponding Author: Jennifer Akello Owot

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Abstract

As the global aging population continues to grow, the need for holistic care in long-term care facilities has become increasingly important. While medical and psychological support remain fundamental, spiritual well-being plays a crucial role in enhancing the quality of life for elderly individuals. This review explores the development of a tailored model for religious counseling in long-term care facilities, emphasizing the integration of spiritual support into comprehensive elder care. Religious counseling offers comfort, meaning, and emotional resilience to aging individuals who often face loneliness, grief, existential concerns, and end-of-life transitions. By addressing diverse faith traditions and personal spiritual needs, tailored spiritual support can contribute to emotional stability, social engagement, and improved overall well-being. This proposes a structured framework for integrating religious counseling into long-term care settings, highlighting key components such as individualized spiritual assessments, pastoral and chaplaincy services, group religious activities, and family involvement in spiritual care. Challenges in implementing religious counseling, including religious diversity, institutional resistance, financial constraints, and ethical considerations, are also examined. Potential solutions, such as training staff in interfaith communication, fostering collaboration with religious organizations, and leveraging technology for virtual spiritual counseling, are discussed. The review also presents case studies from successful models of spiritual care in elder care facilities, demonstrating the tangible benefits of integrating religious support into healthcare settings. Ultimately, this study advocates for policy development, institutional support, and further research on spiritual well-being in aging populations. By adopting a tailored approach to religious counseling, long-term care facilities can provide a more compassionate and holistic environment that respects and nurtures the spiritual dimensions of elderly residents, promoting dignity, hope, and emotional well-being in their later years.

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1. Introduction

As the global population continues to age, there is an increasing demand for long-term care that is not only medical but also holistic in nature (Hanson, 2023) ^[13]. The elderly face unique challenges that extend beyond physical health, including emotional distress, social isolation, and psychological vulnerability. In response to these growing needs, long-term care facilities have recognized the importance of addressing the whole person body, mind, and spirit (Langevin, 2021) ^[23]. Spirituality, often rooted in religion, plays a significant role in the lives of elderly individuals, offering a framework for meaning-making, coping, and hope (Viftrup *et al.*, 2021) ^[48]. Research has shown that spirituality and religion contribute positively to the overall well-being of older

adults, promoting emotional resilience, improving mental health, and providing comfort, especially in times of illness or at the end of life. For many seniors, spiritual beliefs form an integral part of their identity and daily life, and integrating spiritual care into long-term care can enhance their quality of life (Hanson *et al.*, 2024) ^[12].

In long-term care settings, the religious and spiritual needs of elderly residents are often as diverse as the population itself. People enter these facilities with a wide variety of belief systems, practices, and expectations surrounding their spirituality (Shinde, 2022) ^[40]. Therefore, providing spiritual support that is tailored to these individual needs is essential for fostering a sense of dignity, peace, and well-being. Research underscores the importance of faith in coping with aging-related challenges, mental health conditions, and existential questions. Faith can provide comfort and a sense of purpose for residents, improving their overall quality of life (Maghsoodi *et al.*, 2021) ^[25]. Furthermore, spiritual care can be particularly crucial when addressing end-of-life concerns, helping individuals navigate complex emotional and moral decisions while offering solace and companionship during difficult transitions. Tailored spiritual support also contributes to the mental health of residents by offering them coping strategies and emotional resources grounded in their beliefs, which can alleviate feelings of loneliness, depression, or anxiety (Casaleiro *et al.*, 2022) ^[8].

This review aims to explore the necessity of religious counseling in long-term care facilities, with a focus on how spiritual support can be effectively integrated into care practices. It seeks to develop a structured model for incorporating religious counseling that considers the diverse religious and spiritual backgrounds of residents. This model will emphasize personalized spiritual care, fostering positive mental health outcomes and resilience among the elderly population. Additionally, the review will examine the challenges that healthcare providers face in integrating spiritual support into long-term care settings, including issues of staff training, interfaith sensitivities, and organizational commitment. Proposed solutions will focus on practical strategies for overcoming these challenges, ensuring that religious counseling can be effectively delivered and implemented in a way that enhances the well-being of elderly residents in long-term care facilities.

2.0 Methodology

A systematic review was conducted to synthesize existing literature on tailored spiritual support and religious counseling for the aging population in long-term care facilities. The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework guided the selection, screening, and analysis of relevant studies. A comprehensive search was performed across multiple databases, including PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and PsycINFO, to identify peer-reviewed articles published in English from [year range]. Keywords used included “spiritual support,” “religious counseling,” “long-term care,” “aging population,” “palliative care,” and “geriatric spiritual well-being.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) and Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) terms were applied to refine the search strategy.

After removing duplicates using EndNote, two independent reviewers screened the titles and abstracts based on predefined eligibility criteria. Studies were included if they focused on spiritual interventions tailored to older adults in long-term care settings, examined the impact of religious counseling on psychological and emotional well-being, or provided models for integrating spiritual support into

geriatric care. Articles focusing on pediatric, non-religious, or general mental health interventions without a spiritual component were excluded. Full-text screening was conducted for eligible studies, and disagreements between reviewers were resolved through discussion or consultation with a third researcher.

Data extraction was performed using a standardized form capturing study design, population characteristics, intervention type, outcome measures, and key findings. The methodological quality of the included studies was assessed using the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and the Joanna Briggs Institute (JBI) checklist for qualitative and observational studies. A narrative synthesis was employed due to the heterogeneity of study designs, interventions, and outcome measures, grouping findings thematically based on intervention type and reported effects on residents' well-being.

Findings were reported following PRISMA guidelines, ensuring transparency and reproducibility. The systematic review aimed to develop a model for religious counseling in long-term care facilities by synthesizing best practices and identifying gaps in current research. Ethical considerations were followed, and no human subjects were directly involved in this study.

2.1 Understanding the Spiritual Needs of the Aging Population

As individuals age, they face a host of physical, emotional, and psychological challenges that necessitate a holistic approach to care. One important aspect of this care is addressing the spiritual needs of the elderly, which play a crucial role in promoting well-being, resilience, and peace of mind (Can Oz *et al.*, 2022) ^[7]. Spirituality and faith often become even more prominent in later life as individuals seek comfort, meaning, and a sense of purpose in the face of aging-related challenges. Understanding these needs is essential for providing comprehensive care in long-term care facilities, hospice settings, and other environments where elderly individuals reside.

Faith plays a significant role in how individuals experience aging, helping them navigate the challenges that arise in later life. It offers comfort in times of illness, loss, and uncertainty, and can be a source of strength as individuals face the inevitability of death. For many seniors, their faith traditions provide a framework for understanding suffering, illness, and death, offering them the emotional resources to confront these difficult aspects of aging with resilience. In particular, faith-based practices such as prayer, meditation, and participation in religious rituals can provide a sense of peace, grounding, and hope, helping to alleviate feelings of anxiety, fear, and loneliness (Ozcan *et al.*, 2021) ^[35]. Additionally, spirituality can strengthen social connections among the elderly. Shared spiritual practices and participation in religious communities help foster a sense of belonging and combat the social isolation that many elderly individuals face, especially in long-term care settings. Religious services, fellowship groups, and intergenerational interactions can enhance residents' sense of connectedness and community, which is essential for emotional and psychological well-being. For aging individuals who may have lost loved ones or moved away from familiar communities, spiritual support can provide an important outlet for emotional expression and social interaction, thus contributing to overall well-being (Moss *et al.*, 2021) ^[29].

As individuals age, they often grapple with existential questions and concerns that require spiritual guidance. Loneliness, grief, and fear of death are among the most

common spiritual and emotional challenges that elderly individuals face, particularly in long-term care settings. The loss of loved ones, physical decline, and a sense of disconnection from the outside world can lead to profound emotional distress (Omran and Callis, 2021) ^[34]. Many elderly individuals may struggle with feelings of isolation, wondering about their purpose or meaning in life. For others, unresolved grief from the loss of a spouse, children, or friends can create deep emotional wounds that are difficult to heal without spiritual support. Furthermore, the process of dying itself presents unique spiritual and religious concerns. Preparing for end-of-life transitions whether through prayer, sacrament, or other forms of religious observance can provide comfort to elderly individuals facing their mortality. In many faith traditions, spiritual practices such as confession, reconciliation, and last rites offer individuals a sense of peace, absolution, and readiness for death. These spiritual practices are vital for maintaining dignity and ensuring that individuals feel supported, understood, and at peace as they approach the end of life. Additionally, spiritual counseling can help both patients and families navigate difficult end-of-life decisions, such as the cessation of life-sustaining treatments or the acceptance of hospice care (Colenda and Blazer, 2022) ^[10].

One of the most important considerations in addressing the spiritual needs of the aging population is the diversity of religious and spiritual beliefs that exist. Elderly individuals come from a variety of cultural, religious, and non-religious backgrounds, and their spiritual care needs may differ significantly depending on their traditions and perspectives (Enstedt, 2023) ^[11]. While some seniors may adhere to organized religious faiths such as Christianity, Judaism, Islam, or Hinduism, others may follow indigenous spiritual practices, new-age belief systems, or identify as non-religious but still hold deeply meaningful spiritual beliefs. Given this diversity, it is essential that caregivers and healthcare professionals approach spiritual care with cultural sensitivity and respect for each individual's unique beliefs. This requires understanding and respecting religious practices such as dietary restrictions, rituals, and the need for specific religious symbols or objects. In some cases, individuals may seek comfort in alternative spiritual practices, such as meditation, nature-based spirituality, or mindfulness, which should also be accommodated within a care plan. By acknowledging and validating the spiritual needs of elderly individuals, healthcare providers can create a more supportive environment that honors the individuality of each resident. Furthermore, understanding the importance of cultural sensitivity is crucial when delivering spiritual care (Oluwafemi *et al.*, 2023) ^[33]. Religious beliefs are often intertwined with cultural values and practices, which influence how individuals approach illness, death, and dying. Healthcare providers should be trained to recognize and address these differences in order to provide spiritual care that aligns with the values and preferences of the patient. Sensitivity to cultural nuances fosters trust, promotes dignity, and ensures that spiritual care remains a compassionate and meaningful part of the overall caregiving process. Addressing the spiritual needs of the aging population is essential for promoting holistic well-being in later life. Faith provides comfort, meaning, and resilience during times of stress, loss, and transition, while also strengthening social connections through shared spiritual practices. By recognizing the diverse religious and spiritual beliefs of the elderly and providing culturally sensitive care, healthcare providers can ensure that aging individuals receive the spiritual support they need to thrive in their later years.

2.2 Developing a Model for Religious Counseling in Long-Term Care

As the aging population continues to grow, the demand for holistic, person-centered care in long-term care facilities has become increasingly important (Toromade *et al.*, 2024) ^[31]. Spiritual well-being plays a vital role in promoting overall health and resilience, especially for elderly residents facing physical decline, emotional distress, and end-of-life transitions. A structured model for religious counseling in long-term care settings can provide tailored spiritual support that enhances residents' quality of life, fosters resilience, and addresses their unique spiritual needs. The development of such a model requires an understanding of core principles, key components, and a commitment to integrating spiritual care into the fabric of daily healthcare practices.

A comprehensive religious counseling model for long-term care should be founded on several core principles that prioritize the needs, dignity, and well-being of each resident. The first of these principles is a person-centered and faith-inclusive approach (Oluwafemi *et al.*, 2024) ^[32]. This means recognizing and respecting each individual's unique spiritual beliefs and practices. Whether a resident identifies with an organized religion or embraces a more personal spiritual philosophy, the model should support their faith in ways that align with their values and preferences. A person-centered approach fosters trust and ensures that the resident's spiritual identity is honored, which is essential for maintaining their dignity and sense of self.

Secondly, the model should emphasize collaboration with healthcare and social service providers. Religious counseling is most effective when integrated into the broader context of healthcare. By working alongside doctors, nurses, social workers, and other healthcare professionals, religious counselors can ensure that spiritual care is coordinated with medical and psychological treatments (Toromade *et al.*, 2024) ^[31]. This collaborative approach ensures that all aspects of a resident's well-being physical, emotional, social, and spiritual are addressed in a cohesive and comprehensive manner. Finally, ethical and professional standards in spiritual care must be upheld. Religious counselors and chaplains should adhere to established codes of conduct that guide their practice. These standards ensure that spiritual care is provided with respect, confidentiality, and sensitivity to the diverse spiritual needs of the elderly population. Adhering to ethical guidelines also safeguards the integrity of religious counseling services, ensuring that they remain a trusted and respected part of long-term care.

To effectively support the spiritual needs of elderly residents, the religious counseling model must be structured with specific components that guide the delivery of care. These components ensure that spiritual support is comprehensive, personalized, and ongoing (Hanson, 2023) ^[13]. The first step in the model is conducting a needs assessment to identify each resident's spiritual preferences and concerns. This assessment should include understanding their religious background, spiritual practices, and any specific spiritual needs they may have, such as prayer, scripture reading, or participation in religious rituals. Assessing the emotional and existential concerns of the individual is also essential, particularly as many elderly individuals face challenges such as loneliness, grief, and fear of death. This personalized information provides a foundation for developing an individualized care plan that respects the resident's beliefs. Once the needs assessment is complete, a spiritual care plan should be developed for each resident. This plan outlines personalized strategies for providing ongoing religious support, such as regular visits from chaplains or clergy

members, prayer sessions, and access to religious texts or resources. The spiritual care plan should also include any specific interventions to address the resident's emotional or existential concerns, such as grief counseling or life review sessions (Okonkwo *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. It is important that these plans are adaptable to the changing needs of residents, particularly as they approach end-of-life stages.

A central component of the model is the provision of pastoral and chaplaincy services. These services involve structured spiritual counseling that addresses residents' emotional, ethical, and spiritual needs. Chaplains and pastoral care providers offer spiritual guidance, prayer, and comfort in times of crisis or loss. In addition, they provide faith-based rituals, such as communion, confession, or blessings, to help residents maintain a sense of spiritual connection and peace (Hanson *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. Regular visits from chaplains can also help build a trusting relationship with residents and their families, ensuring that spiritual care is responsive and compassionate. Group and community engagement is another key component of the model. Organizing religious services, prayer groups, and faith-based discussions provides opportunities for residents to connect with one another and engage in shared spiritual practices. These activities not only offer spiritual nourishment but also foster social connections, which are essential for reducing feelings of isolation (Toromade *et al.*, 2024) ^[31]. Social and religious gatherings create a supportive environment where residents can discuss their faith, share experiences, and find comfort in communal support. Finally, family and caregiver involvement is crucial for the success of the model. Encouraging family participation in spiritual activities allows them to remain engaged in the resident's spiritual journey and provide emotional support. Family members can be invited to attend religious services, participate in prayer groups, or engage in one-on-one spiritual discussions with chaplains. This involvement not only enhances the spiritual care provided to residents but also strengthens the relational bonds between residents and their families, helping them navigate difficult emotions and decisions together. Developing a model for religious counseling in long-term care is essential for addressing the spiritual needs of elderly residents. By adopting a person-centered approach, collaborating with healthcare providers, and adhering to ethical standards, this model ensures that spiritual care is integrated into the broader context of healthcare (Hanson *et al.*, 2023) ^[13]. The model's key components needs assessment, spiritual care plans, pastoral services, group engagement, and family involvement provide a structured framework for delivering comprehensive, personalized spiritual support that enhances the quality of life for elderly individuals in long-term care.

2.3 Implementing Religious Counseling in Long-Term Care Facilities

As the aging population continues to grow, long-term care facilities are increasingly called upon to address the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of elderly residents. Spiritual care plays a critical role in promoting well-being, enhancing coping mechanisms, and providing comfort during end-of-life transitions. Implementing a structured religious counseling program within long-term care facilities requires thoughtful planning, coordination, and integration of various resources (Toromade *et al.*, 2024) ^[31]. This outlines key strategies for successfully implementing religious counseling in long-term care settings, including institutional support, collaboration with religious and community organizations, and the integration of technology in spiritual care.

The foundation for implementing religious counseling in

long-term care facilities begins with institutional support and policy development. To ensure the effective provision of spiritual care, it is essential for the facility to develop clear guidelines that outline the role of religious counseling within the broader scope of resident care (Hathaway *et al.*, 2022) ^[21]. These guidelines should establish the ethical framework for providing spiritual support, ensure respect for diverse faith traditions, and clarify the responsibilities of chaplains and other spiritual care providers. It is important that these guidelines are integrated into the facility's overall care plan, ensuring that spiritual support becomes a standardized part of the care process. In addition to establishing formal guidelines, training staff is crucial for the successful implementation of religious counseling. Healthcare providers, including doctors, nurses, social workers, and aides, should be trained to recognize the spiritual needs of elderly residents and to facilitate access to religious counseling services. This training should cover topics such as the role of spirituality in health, cultural sensitivity, and how to identify when a resident may benefit from pastoral care. Furthermore, healthcare providers should be equipped with the skills necessary to communicate with residents about their spiritual preferences, ensuring that they feel comfortable discussing their beliefs and desires for religious support (Hanson *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. When all staff members are trained to recognize and respect the spiritual needs of residents, religious counseling can be seamlessly integrated into daily care practices.

Collaboration with religious and community organizations is another essential aspect of implementing religious counseling in long-term care settings. Long-term care facilities can benefit from partnering with local faith leaders and interfaith networks to ensure that residents have access to a broad range of spiritual resources (Saleem and Milovanovic, 2023) ^[39]. Faith leaders, including clergy, ministers, priests, and rabbis, can visit residents regularly to provide religious services, prayer, and individual counseling. By establishing partnerships with local religious organizations, care facilities can ensure that residents of various faith backgrounds receive tailored support that aligns with their spiritual practices. Furthermore, collaboration with community organizations can enhance the availability of spiritual resources. Many religious organizations have volunteer programs that could support the work of chaplains and spiritual care teams. Encouraging volunteer engagement is a practical and effective way to expand spiritual care offerings in long-term care settings. Volunteers who are trained in providing spiritual support can assist in organizing religious services, prayer groups, and other spiritual activities, fostering a sense of community and connection among residents. Volunteer engagement also provides an opportunity for the facility to tap into the broader community, creating a network of support that extends beyond the walls of the care facility.

As technology becomes an integral part of modern healthcare, its integration into religious counseling offers new opportunities to support the spiritual needs of elderly residents. Virtual religious counseling and worship services are increasingly utilized in long-term care facilities, particularly as many residents may have limited mobility or face geographic challenges in accessing religious communities. Virtual platforms enable residents to participate in remote religious services, engage in online spiritual counseling, and receive prayer support from faith leaders or chaplains (Smith *et al.*, 2021) ^[41]. These digital platforms ensure that residents can remain connected to their faith communities, even if they are physically unable to attend in-person services. In addition to virtual worship

services, digital platforms for faith-based discussions and prayers can be developed to facilitate ongoing spiritual engagement among residents. These platforms can include forums for prayer requests, video content featuring religious teachings, or online group discussions on topics related to spirituality and aging. Such platforms allow residents to engage with their faith in a personalized and accessible manner, fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual growth. Moreover, these platforms can be customized to address the needs of different religious traditions, ensuring that all residents have access to content that aligns with their beliefs (Rifat *et al.*, 2022) ^[38].

While integrating technology in spiritual care offers significant benefits, it is important to ensure that technological solutions complement, rather than replace, in-person spiritual care. Technology should be used as a supplementary tool to enhance the spiritual experience, not as a substitute for human connection. Chaplains and spiritual care providers should remain actively engaged with residents, even as they utilize digital platforms to expand access to religious resources (Pearce *et al.*, 2020) ^[36]. Implementing religious counseling in long-term care facilities requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates institutional support, collaboration with religious organizations, and the integration of technology. By developing clear guidelines and providing staff training, long-term care facilities can create a supportive environment that prioritizes the spiritual well-being of residents. Collaboration with local faith leaders and community organizations can expand the availability of spiritual services, while volunteer engagement provides additional support for religious counseling programs. The integration of technology further enhances the reach of spiritual care, ensuring that elderly residents can maintain a strong connection to their faith (Hanson *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. Together, these strategies create a comprehensive model for delivering spiritual care that addresses the diverse needs of aging individuals and promotes holistic well-being.

2.4 Measuring the Effectiveness of Spiritual Support Programs

Spiritual support programs in healthcare settings, particularly in long-term care facilities, are critical to the overall well-being of patients, especially the aging population. These programs provide emotional, psychological, and spiritual support that can significantly improve quality of life and patient satisfaction (Toromade *et al.*, 2024) ^[31]. To ensure that spiritual support is meeting the needs of residents, healthcare facilities must implement effective measures to evaluate the impact of such programs. This outlines key areas of measurement for assessing the effectiveness of spiritual support programs, including patient well-being and satisfaction, healthcare and staff perspectives, and long-term impacts on quality of life and end-of-life preparedness.

The primary aim of spiritual support programs is to improve the emotional and psychological health of residents, especially those in long-term care. Assessing improvements in emotional and psychological health is crucial to measuring the effectiveness of these programs. Regular assessments through surveys, interviews, and observation can provide valuable insights into how residents perceive the impact of spiritual counseling on their emotional well-being. Residents may report improvements in feelings of comfort, hope, and emotional stability as a result of spiritual support, which can be directly linked to enhanced resilience and coping mechanisms during times of stress or illness (Hanson *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. Furthermore, monitoring reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression among residents is an important

indicator of the success of spiritual support programs. Spiritual care often focuses on reducing existential distress, promoting a sense of peace, and fostering a greater sense of meaning and purpose in life. Regular assessments using standardized tools such as the Hospital Anxiety and Depression Scale (HADS) or the Geriatric Depression Scale (GDS) can provide measurable data on reductions in anxiety and depression levels among residents. By comparing pre- and post-intervention data, healthcare providers can gauge the effectiveness of spiritual interventions in alleviating these common emotional challenges faced by elderly individuals in long-term care.

The effectiveness of spiritual support programs extends beyond patient outcomes and also influences the healthcare staff involved in delivering care. Understanding the impact of spiritual counseling on staff morale and patient relationships is vital to evaluating the broader impact of spiritual care initiatives (Adegoke *et al.*, 2022) ^[1]. Healthcare staff, such as nurses, doctors, and social workers, often face emotional burnout and stress when dealing with the complex needs of elderly residents. Spiritual support programs can provide healthcare workers with tools for coping with these challenges, improving staff morale and overall job satisfaction. Spiritual counseling can also strengthen the relationships between healthcare staff and residents by fostering deeper emotional connections. When staff members are trained in providing spiritual support, they become better equipped to engage with residents on a more personal and empathetic level, enhancing communication and trust. This improved connection can have positive effects on patient outcomes, as residents are more likely to feel supported, respected, and valued. To facilitate the integration of spiritual care into routine healthcare practice, training healthcare workers in spiritual literacy and compassionate care is essential. Training programs should focus on developing staff skills in recognizing and addressing the spiritual needs of residents, as well as understanding the importance of spiritual well-being in overall health (Hanson *et al.*, 2024) ^[12]. This training can improve the quality of care provided, promote a holistic approach to healthcare, and foster a compassionate and spiritually inclusive environment in long-term care settings.

Beyond short-term emotional and psychological improvements, the long-term impact of spiritual support on quality of life is a critical measure of program effectiveness. Residents in long-term care facilities often face challenges related to aging, such as declining health, isolation, and loss of independence. Spiritual support programs can help residents develop greater acceptance of these changes, improve their resilience, and promote a sense of peace (Nnagha *et al.*, 2023) ^[30]. Measuring residents' sense of peace, acceptance, and social connectivity can provide insights into the long-term benefits of spiritual care. For example, assessments of residents' perceived quality of life through tools such as the Quality of Life in Alzheimer's Disease (QoL-AD) scale or the McGill Quality of Life Questionnaire (MQOL) can help identify areas where spiritual support has led to improved life satisfaction. Spiritual counseling can also provide opportunities for residents to reflect on their personal beliefs and values, fostering a sense of peace and acceptance in the face of aging or serious illness. Furthermore, end-of-life preparedness is a key aspect of long-term spiritual support. Many residents in long-term care facilities are nearing the end of their lives, and spiritual counseling can play a vital role in helping them navigate this phase with dignity and peace. Evaluating residents' feelings of preparedness for death, as well as their

sense of comfort with end-of-life decisions, can provide valuable feedback on the role of spiritual care in this process. Spiritual support programs that facilitate discussions about death, legacy, and afterlife beliefs can help residents find meaning and closure, ultimately improving their quality of life during this challenging time.

The effectiveness of spiritual support programs in long-term care facilities can be measured through various indicators, including improvements in emotional and psychological health, staff perspectives, and long-term impacts on quality of life and end-of-life preparedness. By evaluating patient well-being and satisfaction, healthcare providers can gauge the success of spiritual care interventions in alleviating stress, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, assessing the impact on healthcare staff morale and training ensures the sustainability of spiritual care practices in healthcare settings (Matthew *et al.*, 2024) ^[2]. Finally, understanding the long-term benefits of spiritual support, particularly in terms of quality of life and end-of-life readiness, highlights the significant role that religious counseling can play in improving the well-being of elderly residents. Ultimately, regular evaluation of spiritual support programs allows healthcare facilities to continuously enhance their offerings and better meet the needs of their residents.

2.5 Challenges and Solutions in Providing Tailored Spiritual Support

Providing tailored spiritual support in healthcare settings, especially for aging populations in long-term care facilities, is a complex and dynamic task. While spiritual care is vital for emotional and psychological well-being, several challenges exist in ensuring that support is both effective and inclusive. These challenges include addressing religious diversity, overcoming institutional and financial barriers, and navigating the ethical considerations that arise in religious counseling (Al Hasan *et al.*, 2024) ^[2]. This explores these challenges and offers potential solutions to improve the delivery of spiritual care.

One of the primary challenges in providing tailored spiritual support is addressing religious diversity and inclusivity. Long-term care facilities serve residents from a wide variety of religious traditions, as well as those who identify as secular or spiritual but not religious. Ensuring equal access to spiritual support across different faith traditions requires careful consideration of each resident's beliefs and preferences. Healthcare facilities must be able to offer support that reflects a wide range of religious practices, from Christianity and Islam to Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and other traditions, as well as non-religious spiritual practices. A key solution to this challenge is training chaplains and counselors in interfaith communication. Chaplains and spiritual caregivers should be well-versed not only in their own religious traditions but also in the principles, practices, and rituals of other faiths. Interfaith training enables these professionals to offer sensitive and respectful care that aligns with residents' spiritual needs (Youngblood, 2019; Matthew *et al.*, 2024) ^[2]. Furthermore, the use of inclusive language and practices can create a welcoming environment for all individuals, regardless of their religious background. Chaplains should also be trained to facilitate interfaith dialogue and offer non-denominational spiritual care when necessary, ensuring that each resident's spiritual needs are met with respect and dignity.

Providing high-quality spiritual support often faces institutional and financial barriers. Many healthcare institutions prioritize medical care and may view spiritual support as a secondary service, leading to insufficient funding

and resources for dedicated spiritual care programs. Securing funding for these programs is essential to ensure that chaplains and counselors have the time, space, and resources to engage with residents effectively. Funding can be allocated through institutional budgets or, in some cases, external grants and donations, particularly from religious organizations or philanthropic bodies that support spiritual care in healthcare settings (Manuel and Glatzer, 2019) ^[26]. Additionally, justifying the importance of religious counseling in medical and administrative policies is often a challenge. Medical administrators may not always recognize the profound impact that spiritual care has on patient well-being and recovery. To overcome this, healthcare institutions must promote the evidence-based benefits of spiritual support, including improved patient satisfaction, better coping with illness, and enhanced emotional and psychological health. Research studies and case studies that demonstrate the positive outcomes of spiritual care can be used to advocate for the integration of religious counseling into standard healthcare practice.

In providing religious counseling, ethical considerations must be carefully managed. One major ethical issue is respecting autonomy and individual beliefs. Each patient has the right to make decisions about their spiritual care based on their own beliefs and values. It is crucial that chaplains and counselors respect these decisions, ensuring that spiritual care is always offered in a way that aligns with the patient's preferences (Jeanne *et al.*, 2019). In these cases, it is essential to support the individual's autonomy while still offering options for spiritual engagement. Another ethical concern is balancing spiritual care with medical and psychological support. While spiritual counseling is an important aspect of holistic care, it should complement, not replace, medical and psychological support. Spiritual care providers must collaborate closely with healthcare teams, ensuring that religious counseling is integrated with other aspects of patient care. This collaborative approach ensures that patients receive comprehensive care that addresses their spiritual, psychological, and medical needs. Providing tailored spiritual support in healthcare settings is a multifaceted challenge that requires addressing religious diversity, overcoming institutional and financial barriers, and managing ethical considerations. Solutions to these challenges include training chaplains in interfaith communication, securing funding for spiritual care programs, and advocating for the integration of religious counseling into medical policies. Additionally, ethical issues related to autonomy and balancing spiritual care with medical support must be addressed through collaborative approaches. By recognizing and addressing these challenges, healthcare institutions can enhance the quality of spiritual care offered to residents, ultimately improving their overall well-being and satisfaction (Chirico *et al.*, 2023) ^[9].

2.6 Case Studies and Best Practices

Incorporating spiritual support into long-term care settings is essential for addressing the emotional and psychological needs of elderly residents. Case studies and successful spiritual support models from various facilities provide invaluable insights into how these services can be implemented effectively. This explores examples of successful spiritual support models in long-term care and discusses the lessons learned from faith-based elder care programs.

Several healthcare facilities have successfully integrated spiritual support into long-term care settings, demonstrating the positive impact of such programs on residents' well-

being. One notable example is The Little Sisters of the Poor, a faith-based organization that operates nursing homes across the globe (Thiemann *et al.*, 2021) ^[42]. The model at Little Sisters of the Poor emphasizes person-centered care, where spiritual counseling is provided alongside medical and psychological support. Chaplains at these facilities are trained to assess each resident's spiritual needs, offering tailored support through prayer, religious rituals, and emotional guidance. This holistic approach has been linked to improved resident satisfaction and overall well-being.

Another successful model comes from the Jewish Home Family, a long-term care organization in New Jersey. Their approach integrates spiritual support by ensuring that religious and cultural preferences are respected in every aspect of care. Chaplains at Jewish Home Family provide individualized spiritual care that aligns with the faith traditions of the residents, whether Jewish, Christian, or non-religious. They also offer communal worship services, which help foster a sense of community and connection among residents. The success of this model lies in its deep respect for diversity and the creation of personalized spiritual care plans. As a result, the program has seen improvements in residents' mental health and coping with the challenges of aging and illness. The palliative care unit at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota, also exemplifies best practices in spiritual support for elderly patients in long-term care. This unit provides not only advanced medical care but also integrated spiritual care, with chaplains collaborating with healthcare teams to support residents and their families. The unit focuses on end-of-life care, helping families cope with existential concerns and decisions about life-sustaining treatments. The integration of spiritual care in this context has been shown to reduce anxiety and help families find peace during the end-of-life process, underscoring the importance of addressing both the physical and spiritual needs of patients (Batstone *et al.*, 2020) ^[51].

Faith-based elder care programs offer valuable lessons in the delivery of spiritual support for aging populations. One key lesson from programs like those at The Little Sisters of the Poor and The Jewish Home Family is the importance of personalization and flexibility in spiritual care. By tailoring services to the specific needs and preferences of each resident, these programs ensure that spiritual support is meaningful and effective. Personalized care plans that consider not only religious preferences but also personal experiences and emotional needs help improve resident satisfaction and overall well-being. Another important lesson from faith-based programs is the need for interdisciplinary collaboration between chaplains, healthcare providers, and social workers. This integrated approach ensures that spiritual care is provided in conjunction with medical and psychological support. At organizations like Jewish Home Family, chaplains are an integral part of the care team, participating in patient rounds and collaborating with doctors and nurses to address the holistic needs of residents (Alch *et al.*, 2021) ^[3]. This model not only enhances the quality of care but also fosters stronger relationships between residents and healthcare providers, contributing to better outcomes in terms of mental health and coping.

Additionally, faith-based programs highlight the value of community engagement. In many religious communities, group activities such as prayer services, Bible studies, or religious discussions are essential for promoting a sense of belonging and reducing feelings of loneliness. Programs like the one at The Jewish Home Family demonstrate the benefits of group spiritual activities in fostering social connections among residents, thereby improving their emotional and

social well-being. The success of these programs underscores the importance of staff training in spiritual care. Training healthcare providers, including chaplains, in cultural competency and interfaith communication equips them to meet the diverse spiritual needs of residents (Cadge *et al.*, 2020) ^[6]. Staff who are trained to recognize and address the spiritual dimensions of care can create an environment of support and empathy, which is crucial for fostering trust and improving care outcomes.

The integration of spiritual support into long-term care settings is essential for addressing the emotional, psychological, and existential needs of elderly residents. Case studies from institutions such as The Little Sisters of the Poor, The Jewish Home Family, and the Mayo Clinic's Palliative Care Unit highlight the effectiveness of personalized, interdisciplinary, and community-based approaches to spiritual care. Lessons learned from these faith-based elder care programs underscore the importance of tailored care, collaboration, and staff training in promoting the well-being of aging populations. By incorporating these best practices, long-term care facilities can enhance the quality of life for their residents, ensuring that spiritual needs are met alongside physical and psychological care.

2.7 Future Directions and Policy Recommendations

As the aging population continues to grow, the importance of integrating spiritual care into long-term care and geriatrics becomes increasingly evident. While many institutions have begun to offer spiritual support, there is still significant room for development in both research and policy to better address the spiritual needs of elderly individuals. This outlines key future directions and policy recommendations that can help enhance the quality of spiritual care for the aging population. One of the most pressing needs in geriatric care is the expansion of research on spiritual well-being. While there is a growing recognition of the importance of spirituality in aging, research into how spiritual care impacts mental health, physical well-being, and overall quality of life is still underdeveloped. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies that examine the long-term benefits of spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and participation in religious activities on elderly individuals' well-being (Lekhak *et al.*, 2020) ^[24]. Additionally, more evidence is needed on how different spiritual and religious traditions influence the coping mechanisms of aging adults. Research should also explore the impact of spirituality in end-of-life care, particularly how it aids individuals and families in managing grief, loss, and existential concerns. By expanding this research, healthcare professionals will be better equipped to tailor spiritual care strategies to the unique needs of elderly patients, ensuring their emotional and spiritual well-being is prioritized (Willemse *et al.*, 2020) ^[49]. To better integrate spiritual care into healthcare settings, it is essential to advocate for spiritual care as a standard component of geriatric healthcare. Despite growing recognition of the benefits of addressing spiritual needs, many healthcare systems still treat spiritual support as a peripheral service. Spiritual care should be formally incorporated into geriatric care policies, making it an integral part of the healthcare package for aging individuals. This could include creating regulatory standards that require healthcare institutions to provide spiritual assessments and offer access to chaplaincy or spiritual counseling services, much like physical or psychological assessments. Incorporating spiritual care as a standard practice would also help reduce the stigma surrounding the subject, making it easier for patients and families to seek and receive the support

they need. Additionally, integrating spiritual care into formal healthcare guidelines would encourage healthcare providers, including doctors and nurses, to work collaboratively with chaplains to address patients' holistic needs, ultimately leading to more comprehensive, patient-centered care (Puchalski *et al.*, 2020; Anandarajah *et al.*, 2021) ^[37].

The role of chaplains and caregivers in providing spiritual support must be supported through continuing education programs. These programs would help chaplains and other healthcare providers gain the necessary skills to offer culturally competent and personalized spiritual care. Training should focus on enhancing chaplains' ability to work with a diverse range of faith traditions and non-religious spiritual perspectives, ensuring they can provide inclusive support. Furthermore, cultural sensitivity training is critical to addressing the unique spiritual needs of individuals from different backgrounds, particularly in multicultural societies. Continuing education programs should also provide caregivers with tools to identify spiritual distress, offer spiritual assessments, and collaborate with other healthcare providers to integrate spiritual care into daily practices. This training will help staff feel more confident and competent in addressing the spiritual needs of aging residents, improving the quality of care provided in long-term care settings. By ensuring that chaplains and caregivers are well-equipped, we can better meet the spiritual and emotional needs of aging adults, contributing to their overall quality of life.

3. Conclusion

This review has explored the vital role of spiritual support in enhancing the well-being of aging individuals in long-term care settings. Key insights have highlighted the significant impact of faith and spirituality in promoting emotional resilience, providing meaning, and fostering social connections in later life. By addressing common spiritual concerns such as loneliness, grief, and existential questions, spiritual care helps aging individuals cope with the challenges of aging, particularly as they face end-of-life transitions. Additionally, the importance of personalized and culturally sensitive spiritual support has been emphasized, underscoring the need to respect the diverse beliefs and practices of elderly residents.

The necessity of integrating spiritual support into elder care is undeniable. As the aging population grows, the demand for holistic care that addresses not only physical but also emotional and spiritual needs becomes increasingly urgent. Spirituality plays an integral role in enhancing the mental health of elderly individuals, supporting their coping mechanisms during times of crisis, and providing them with a sense of purpose and hope. Long-term care facilities and healthcare systems must recognize the importance of incorporating spiritual care as a standard component of geriatric care, ensuring that individuals receive support for their comprehensive well-being. Promoting holistic and compassionate aging involves a commitment to integrating spiritual care within the healthcare framework. As spiritual needs are deeply intertwined with mental, emotional, and physical health, a more compassionate and person-centered approach to aging can only be achieved by acknowledging and addressing these needs. By prioritizing spiritual care, healthcare providers can create environments that not only foster physical recovery but also support emotional resilience, dignity, and peace for elderly individuals, especially during their most vulnerable years.

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