

Co-funded PhD research programme established between the School of Humanities at Waterford Institute of Technology (WIT) and the Spirituality Institute for Research and Education (SpIRE), Dublin. The project is entitled HUNGER FOR FOOD, HUNGER FOR LIFE: THE INNER SPIRITUAL WORLD OF WOMEN WHO HAVE OVERCOME EATING DISORDERS.

An estimated 188,895 Irish people will experience an eating disorder at some point in their lives and approximately three quarters of these people are women. In Ireland the extent to which women have used spiritual interventions in the journey through eating disorders has not been researched, despite some articles in the public media providing narrative accounts of effective spiritual interventions. These personal accounts report how Finding Stillness, Practicing Gratitude; Expressive Prayer; Connection with a Higher Power assisted in the journey of recovery. The researcher will employ an exploratory methodology (1) To identify spiritual interventions which were used by women aged 35 – 65 (2) To assess the academic literature regarding such spiritual interventions (3) To discover the lineage of such spiritual interventions? (4) To investigate how the choice of spiritual practices by Irish clients converge / diverge with the choices made by those who have recovered from eating disorders in studies in other parts of the world? (5) To analyse the narratives of research participants so as to identify any generic characteristics of spiritual resilience that are specific to the Eating Disorder recovery journey, by collating with parallel personal histories reported in narrative medicine findings.

The study will employ desk based; narrative; and contemplative research methodologies. It will be retrospective in focus and will not seek to undertake medical interventions. The findings will have the potential to contribute a unique range of interventions for the treatment of the growing numbers of young women with eating disorders in Ireland.

In the HSE's National Clinical Programme for Eating Disorders (2018; p.110), the need for "specialist" care for spiritual issues related to eating disorders is noted, but not developed – thus providing a hint for future directions of treatment that need further research, such as the project being proposed here.

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