BY THE MERCY AND HELP OF GOD: TOWARDS A RELIGIOUSNESS-HEALTH INFORMATION SEEKING AND SCANNING BEHAVIORS FRAMEWORK

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ABSTRACT

While empirical evidence for the unfavorable consequences of international and temporary labor migration on women’s health has increased, theoretic explanations and programmatic efforts are limited. Situated against the context of Filipino female foreign domestic workers in Hong Kong, this dissertation seeks to understand further the challenges posed by migration on health through health communication. As a new series of inquiry, its overall objective is to explore the relationship between religiousness and health information acquisition and to identify the circumstances upon which the relationship may hold. It advances a social resources argument and a psychological resources argument to clarify the connection between religiousness and health information acquisition. Using mixed-method design, it answers the following key questions: What are the influential factors behind health information acquisition? Why does religiousness relate to health information acquisition? In what circumstances does the relationship between religiousness and health information acquisition hold? Broadly speaking, this dissertation is guided by various theories from sociology, psychology, and health communication.

In order to answer the objective and questions, two related studies are pursued. This dissertation has designed Study 1 and Study 2 as a joint task to explore the relationship between religiousness and health information acquisition. As a formative research, Study 1 was conducted to generate contextual knowledge regarding the relationship between religiousness and health information acquisition. Based on focus group discussions, Study 1 demonstrated that Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong acquire different topics using various sources. It revealed that social ties were influential social factors for health information acquisition. It also suggested that efficacy and health consciousness were influential psychological factors for health information acquisition. Interestingly, Study 1 pointed to the emergence of religiousness in health information
acquisition. Furthermore, it suggested that trust and tailorability were influential information carrier factors or relevant channel beliefs in the use of health information sources.

Drawing insights from Study 1, Study 2 explored further the relationship between religiousness and health information acquisition and the circumstances upon which the relationship may hold. Results from a survey supported all hypotheses for the social resources argument. Religious attendance was positively related to social ties, in turn, social ties were positively related to health information acquisition. The extent to which religious attendance promote health information acquisition among Filipino FDWs in Hong Kong can be explained through social ties. Likewise, results provide further clarification to the research questions for the psychological resources argument. Health consciousness and efficacy were found to offer promising explanations for the relationship between religious beliefs and communication and health information acquisition. In addition, trustworthiness and tailorability significantly predicted health information seeking and scanning from employers and the Internet.

Several implications on future research, program, and policy efforts deserve to be mentioned. First, health communication has the conceptual tools to problematize the overlooked connection among migration, health, and religion. To date, this dissertation is the first to explore the migration-health-religion connection through health information acquisition. At present, this dissertation is the first to propose that health promotion and education for health information acquisition among migrants with strong religious beliefs should emphasize psychological resources. In order for health communication to make a constructive difference, it should be able to inform stakeholders of the need for accessible and quality health information for migrants and this dissertation is a step to that direction.