

STUDY OF END-OF-LIFE PARANORMAL PHENOMENA RECOGNIZED BY PALLIATIVE CARE HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN PORTUGAL

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Background: End-of-life experiences (ELEs), including phenomena such as terminal lucidity or deathbed visions, are often reported by palliative care professionals yet remain underexplored in medical education and practice. These phenomena may influence both the caregiving process and professionals' understanding of dying.

Aims: To assess the frequency and nature of reported end-of-life paranormal phenomena in Portuguese palliative care settings, and to evaluate their perceived impact on spirituality, clinical practice, and professional training needs.

Methods: A retrospective observational study was conducted between October 2022 and January 2023. The ParaPall survey, developed by the authors, was distributed to healthcare professionals in adult palliative care. Participants completed a demographic questionnaire, the ParaPall survey, PANAS, and the Intrinsic Spirituality Scale. A total of 137 responses were analyzed quantitatively.

Results: Of the 137 participants, 89.4% reported witnessing at least one type of paranormal phenomenon. Terminal lucidity and patients dying shortly after meaningful visits were the most cited (84.7%). 50.4% reported cases where cognitively impaired patients experienced sudden clarity before death. Visions of deceased loved ones were reported by 48.9% of professionals. Paranormal phenomena were largely considered spiritual events, expected during the end-of-life, and offering comfort to patients and families. Personal exposure to ELEs played a significant role in shaping interpretations. Professionals with more frequent experiences tended to interpret them spiritually ($p < .001$), which correlated with increased emotional investment in care, greater professional fulfillment, and positive impacts on their spirituality. Conversely, those attributing ELEs to stress, drug-induced hallucinations, or fabrications experienced higher avoidance behavior and career dissatisfaction. Respondents also reported stigma around ELEs and a strong demand for training.

Conclusions: ELEs are highly prevalent in Portuguese palliative care and significantly influence professionals' spirituality, well-being and clinical practice. Findings underscore the importance of incorporating these experiences into training and reflective practice as a way to reduce stigma, avoid overmedication and improve support for both caregivers and patients during the dying process.

Keywords: End-of-life experiences, Palliative care, Spirituality, Healthcare professionals

Publications:

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