Study of Religion and Spirituality as a Protective Factor Against Depression and Anxiety Symptoms in Younger and Older Adults

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Abstract

Recently, there has been a rise in depression and anxiety in the United States (Czeisler, et al., 2020). Religion and spirituality have been shown to be buffers against the development of depression and anxiety (Basir et al., 2009). This study sought to examine the effect of religion and spirituality as protective factors on symptoms of depression and anxiety in both young and older adults. A secondary analysis was conducted on data from the Midlife Development in the United States Refresher (MIDUS-R). A series of logistic regression analysis were utilized to predict the presence of anxiety or depression symptoms among younger and older generation groups. Results showed that religious service attendance decreased the likelihood of having anxiety symptoms among older adults. Additionally, religious identification increased the likelihood of having anxiety symptoms, and private religious practices also increased the likelihood of having depressive symptoms among older adults. No religious variables significantly predicted the presence of anxiety or depression symptoms among the young adult group. This study’s findings suggest that religion has both a positive and negative relationship with mental health among older adults. Future research should further explore how these generational changes in attitude towards religion between younger and older adults may or may not affect an individual’s mental health.

Methods

The current study completed a secondary analysis on the data from the Midlife Development in the United States Refresher (MIDUS-R). The MIDUS-R is the most recent wave of a multi-wave longitudinal panel study developed to better understand what factors over a lifespan, beginning in midlife, led to person to achieve good health, psychological wellbeing, and social responsibility in old age. The MIDUS-R randomly selected 3,577 participants throughout the U.S. who were non-institutionalized English-speaking adults. Data was collected through an initial telephone survey and a follow-up mailed self-administered questionnaire (SAQ).

Purpose of Research

This study aims to examine (1) The effect of religion and spirituality as protective factors on symptoms of depression and anxiety, and (2) The generational differences in the effect of religion and spirituality on mental health between younger and older adults.

Research Questions

- Do religion and spirituality function as protective factors against symptoms of Anxiety?
- Do religion and spirituality function as protective factors against Symptoms of Depression?
- Does the strength of religion and spirituality as a protective factor differ between young adults and older adults?

Research Hypotheses

1. Religion and spirituality will have a negative relationship with symptoms of depression among adults.
2. Religion and spirituality will have a negative relationship with anxiety symptoms among young adults.
3. Religion and spirituality will be stronger protective factors for older adults when compared to younger adults.

Results

Analysis of Young Adults

- A binary logistic regression analysis was used to identify the effect of religiosity and spirituality variables on the presence of anxiety and depression symptoms. None of the religious variables predicted symptoms of anxiety or depression.

Analysis of Older Adults

- A binary logistic regression analysis was performed to identify the effect of religiosity and spirituality variables on the presence of anxiety symptoms among older adults. The religious service attendance variable significantly negatively predicted the presence of symptoms of anxiety among older adults and the religious identification variable also significantly positively predicted the presence of symptoms of anxiety among older adults.

Independent Variables:
- Religious Identification
- Religious Service Attendance
- Religious Practices

Control Variables:
- Religious Identification
- Religious Service Attendance
- Religious Practices

References (selected)


