

The Impact of Religion on the Mental Health of Black and Latinx Women



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Abstract

Research on religion has largely focused on the positive impact of religiosity and religious identity on the mental health of individuals, however, differences between ethnicities have not been considered. It has been found that Black and Latinx individuals experience increased levels of distress with higher levels of religious service attendance (Mickelson & Tabak, 2009). The present study suggests aspects of religiosity can have a negative impact on the mental health of Black and Latinx women.

Introduction

Religion and mental health are intricately intertwined in our society as religion plays a role in everyday life for millions of individuals worldwide. This role **can have both negative and positive implications**, varying from individual to individual.

Over half of the United States population believes religion is very important in their lives and **it plays a major role** in their life and decision-making

Research question: What is the relationship between religion and the mental health of Black and Latinx women?

Hypothesis: It was hypothesized that higher levels of religiosity would show increased negative impacts on the mental health of Black and Latinx women.

Literature Review

Religion in **collectivistic cultures** is highly respected, as many of the collectivistic groups' moral codes and standards of living stem from the religion they follow (Cohen et al., 2016).

A study found that for non-Latino whites, regular attendance correlated with lower levels of distress. In comparison, **Latino and Black members who regularly attend religious services showed higher levels of distress** (Tabak & Mickelson, 2009).

It was found spirituality and religion for LGBTQ+ youth functioned as **a supportive behavior** for some **and also led to negative perceptions of self related to their identity** contradicting with religious teachings (McCann et al., 2020).

Methodology

Research design: The present study is a secondary cross-sectional quantitative analysis of the data used in the Project STRIDE study. Project STRIDE was a three-year longitudinal research study examining the effects of individuals' stress levels and minority identity relating to their sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, and gender on mental health.

Sample: The present study utilized a subsample from this study using a convenience sampling framework to focus on Black women ($n=64$) and Latina women ($n=67$). The total sample size for the present study was $n=131$.

Measures: The present study focused only on quantitative data on demographic characteristics, religiosity, social well-being, psychological well-being, and collective self-esteem.

Statistical Analysis: A series of multiple linear regressions were conducted to predict the research hypothesis and provide inferential analysis data.

Discussion

- The results of the inferential analyses indicated that overall religiousness does not have a significant impact on the mental health of Black and Latinx women.
- The overall findings of the study revealed a negative relationship between private prayer frequency and social well-being, as well as between private prayer frequency and collective self-esteem, aligning with the findings of Mickelson & Tabak (2009) and McCann et al. (2020).
- These findings suggest that although religion can be a positive, or protective factor, some aspects of religion can have detrimental effects on minority populations.
- It is possible that as Black and Latinx communities tend to be collectivistic in nature, religion has an increased impact on their perceptions of self and others.

Implications for Research & Practice

- It is important to assess levels of religiosity without assuming religion as a protective factor. Assessments should include questions that measure the religiosity and relationship each client has with religion.
- Clients that have been negatively impacted by certain aspects of religion may still seek the positive attributes they found with religiosity (sense of faith, community). Social workers can work with clients in creating safe spaces that serve the purpose of connectivity without the harmful effects.
- Future research can inquire on ways to help individuals find a healthy reconnection to their religiosity.
- Future research would benefit from expanding on the findings of this study, further examining which aspects of religiosity are most commonly detrimental and which aspects serve as protective factors.

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Results

