

Religious belief and devotion linked to sense of personal control

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(PhysOrg.com) -- An individual's level of commitment to religious rituals like praying and attending service is directly linked to their sense of personal control in life, according to new University of Toronto research.

U of T sociology professor Scott Schieman interviewed 1,800 Americans in a groundbreaking survey that examined the link between levels of religious beliefs and sense of personal control over events and outcomes in everyday life.

Among the study's surprising results:

People who believe in a powerful and influential God but aren't as strongly devoted to religious rituals like praying or attending service report a lower sense of personal control in their lives; by contrast, individuals who believe that God's will influences outcomes in everyday life do not report a deflated sense of personal control if they actively participate in religious rituals.

This study is published in the October issue of the journal *Sociology of Religion*.

"One might think the most devout religious practitioners would feel a lack of personal control in their lives because they have such faith in divine control," said Schieman. "Surprisingly, we found the opposite. It's those who believe in God but don't dedicate much time to practising

religion who feel the least in control of their lives."

Schieman says these findings are particularly important in the current economic climate, when many people are losing their jobs, their homes and their savings.

"Some people feel unable to change the important events and outcomes in their daily lives. Some people turn to a divine power or authority for support. In some cases, this also implies a sense that one's own fate is influenced or determined by powerful external forces, especially God," Schieman said. "This notion of divine control is reflected in common phrases like 'It is all in God's hands.'"

Provided by University of Toronto

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