

Older black men feel productive, achieve prestige at church

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Older African American women may attend religious services more often than African American men, but men spend more hours per week in other activities at church, a new University of Michigan study found.

In addition to congregational activities—men’s club, choir and bible study—men also perform various activities at the church, such as cleaning, cutting grass, opening and closing the building, and minor repairs.

“Churches may be a primary social outlet and sphere of productive activity for older African American men, particularly those who are no longer active in the labor force,” said Robert Taylor, professor at the U-M School of Social Work and a faculty associate at the Research Center for Group Dynamics at the Institute for Social Research.

The church also serves as a venue for men to retain, or perhaps achieve, important work roles, status and prestige even if they are not employed, he said.

Taylor and colleagues used data from the older African American subsample of the National Survey of American Life. The study, which appears in the recent issue of *Research on Aging*, includes responses from 837 people aged 55 and older.

Participants were asked about their weekend [religious](#) participation, such as the frequency of going to places of worship, the number of hours

spent there and activities they take part in at church.

Taylor said gender and marital status are significantly associated with the frequency of attending [religious services](#).

Women usually participate in congregational activities, such as study groups, more often than men but spend less time in unstructured activities, including doing chores or talking with friends, the study found.

Divorced respondents are more likely than married respondents to indicate that they had not attended services since age 18. Never-married respondents say that they spent fewer hours at religious services than married respondents.

Taylor said religious communities provide opportunities for marital and family life counseling, as well as access to reference groups and individuals who model and reinforce shared values and behaviors relating to marital accord.

For many people who frequent church, their experience within religious settings may make them “less vulnerable to marital problems and marital dissolution compared with their counterparts who have not attended services as adults,” Taylor said.

Source: University of Michigan

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