

Study shows religious beliefs impact levels of worry

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Researchers at Harvard-affiliated McLean Hospital have found that those who believe in a benevolent God tend to worry less and be more tolerant of life's uncertainties than those who believe in an indifferent or punishing God.

The paper, recently published in the *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, which will be presented by lead author David H. Rosmarin, PhD, assistant in psychology at McLean, at the annual meeting of the [American Psychological Association](#) on Friday, Aug. 5 in Washington, D.C., urges mental health professionals to integrate patients' [spiritual beliefs](#) into their treatment regimens, especially for patients who are religious.

"The implications of this paper for the field of psychiatry are that we have to take patients' spirituality more seriously than we do," Rosmarin said.

"Most practitioners are unprepared to conceptualize how spiritual beliefs may contribute to affective states and thus many struggle to integrate such themes into treatment in a spiritually sensitive manner," the paper says.

The paper reports data from two separate studies. One questioned 332 subjects solicited from religious web sites and religious organizations. It included Christians and Jews.

This study found that those who trusted in God to look out for them had lower levels of worry and less intolerance of uncertainty in their lives than those who had a "mistrust" of God to help them out.

The second study was of 125 subjects culled from Jewish organizations. They were shown an audio-video program designed to increase trust in God and decrease mistrust in God. Participants in the two-week program reported significant increases in trust in God and significant decreases in mistrust in God, as well as clinically and statistically significant decreases in intolerance of uncertainty, worry and stress.

"These findings...suggest that certain spiritual beliefs are tied to intolerance of uncertainty and worry for some individuals," the paper concludes.

"We found that the positive beliefs of trust in God were associated with less worry and that this relationship was partially mediated by lower levels of intolerance of uncertainty," it added. "Conversely, the negative beliefs of mistrust in God correlated with higher worry and intolerance..."

The study sought to get a greater understanding of why people worry.

"We had proposed that beliefs about God, both positive and negative, would relate to both worry and intolerance of uncertainty and we found support for our model," Rosmarin said in an interview. "They do relate."

The paper noted that other studies have shown that 93 percent of Americans believe in [God](#) or a higher power and that 50 percent of them say that religion is very important to them.

"Furthermore, existing evidence indicates that many areas of spirituality and religion are salient predictors of psychological functioning," it adds.

Yet Rosmarin said that mental health providers rarely if ever ask patients about their spiritual beliefs. "That's crazy," he said. "We don't even ask. We aren't trained to. And it is important."

Rosmarin said the matter is "a health care issue, not a religious issue," and said that by knowing what people believe, mental health professionals can do a better job of helping patients.

Provided by McLean Hospital

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