

Parents, religion guard against college drinking

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A study by researcher Zaje Harrell, Michigan State University, suggests parental influence helps religious college students control their drinking. Credit: Michigan State University

Religious college students report less alcohol use than their classmates – and the reason may have to do with how their parents handle stress, according to new research by a Michigan State University scholar.

The study found that students who used [religious practices](#) such as praying and meditating as a coping mechanism reported less frequent [alcohol](#) use and less heavy drinking.

Further, the parents of those students reported using religious or spiritual practices when facing stress, which was linked to the behaviors reported by the students. This suggests the parents' behavior had an effect on their children's coping practices, said Zaje Harrell, MSU assistant professor of psychology.

"Parents face a lot of day-to-day stressors and what they do to cope with these stressors appears to be related to outcomes in their children," Harrell said. "If you cope with those [stressors](#) in a way that is effective, it can show up in your children's lives in ways you wouldn't necessarily think."

Binge drinking on college campuses has become a significant public health concern and previous research has shown a relationship between religious coping and alcohol use, the study says. Harrell is one of the first researchers to look at how parental coping and religious behaviors influence drinking outcomes.

Harrell surveyed 129 [college students](#) and their parents for the study, which appears online in the *Journal of Religion and Health*.

Prior to the study, Harrell also predicted the students' beliefs about alcohol norms and the social support they receive through religion would both protect them against heavy drinking.

Religious students did indeed have more conservative beliefs about when it is appropriate to drink alcohol, and this was a protective factor.

But Harrell was surprised to find that social support, which is often found in [religious communities](#), was not a protective factor against alcohol use.

Provided by Michigan State University

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