

# Researcher studies the impact religion has on sleep quality

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Can a person's religious practices impact their sleep quality? That's the focus of a new study by Christopher Ellison in The University of Texas at San Antonio (UTSA) Department of Sociology and his collaborators.

Ellison worked with Terrence D. Hill, associate professor of sociology at the University of Arizona, and Reed T. Deangelis '15 '17, a UTSA alumnus and a doctoral student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, on a paper published in *Sleep Health: Journal of the National Sleep Foundation*.

The researchers reviewed several large studies of [religious involvement](#) and sleep-related outcomes that included people from different age groups and religions. They analyzed several measures of religious involvement, including religious attendance, religious importance and frequency of prayer.

After examining these studies, the researchers concluded that people who have higher levels of religious involvement tend to have healthier sleep outcomes than their less religious counterparts.

Ellison believes the data suggests a person's religious involvement benefits their mental health by reducing stress, promoting social engagement and support from fellow church members, providing psychological resources (hope, optimism, sense of meaning) and promoting healthier lifestyles (lower levels of substance abuse).

"This research is relatively uncharted territory that allows us to better understand the way in which religion and spirituality affect a person's health and overall quality of life," said Ellison.

Ellison and his collaborators plan to present new research findings on this topic at the Association for the Sociology of Religion (ASR) meetings in Philadelphia in August 2018.

This follow-up project is based on data from a large, recent nationwide survey of U.S. adults. With this data, Ellison and his associates discovered that persons with a greater sense of assurance of spiritual

salvation tend to enjoy better [sleep quality](#) and tend to have fewer negative sleep consequences due to stressful life events and chronic conditions. Ellison said much of the benefit of perceived spiritual salvation among the faithful is because these persons have lower levels of psychological distress, i.e., feelings of depressed affect and anxiety.

In 2011, Ellison co-authored a study that linked measures of religious involvement (religious attendance, prayer and secure attachment to God) with sleep outcomes (sleep quality, restless sleep, use of sleep medications). In the study, researchers used data collected from a national probability sample of active elders and other active members of the Presbyterian Church (USA) (2005-2007).

The data showed that religious attendance and frequency of prayer were positively associated with overall sleep quality but unrelated to restless sleep and use of sleep medications. Ellison and his collaborators concluded religion could decrease psychological distress, substance abuse and stress exposure, which are all associated with sleep outcomes.

Ellison's research areas include religious influences on mental and physical health and mortality risk, religious variations in family life, the role of religion in racial and ethnic minority populations and religious influences on social and political attitudes. He has published two books and nearly 200 peer-reviewed articles and book chapters on these and other topics.

**More information:** Terrence D. Hill et al. Religious involvement as a social determinant of sleep: an initial review and conceptual model, *Sleep Health* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.sleh.2018.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2018.04.001)

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