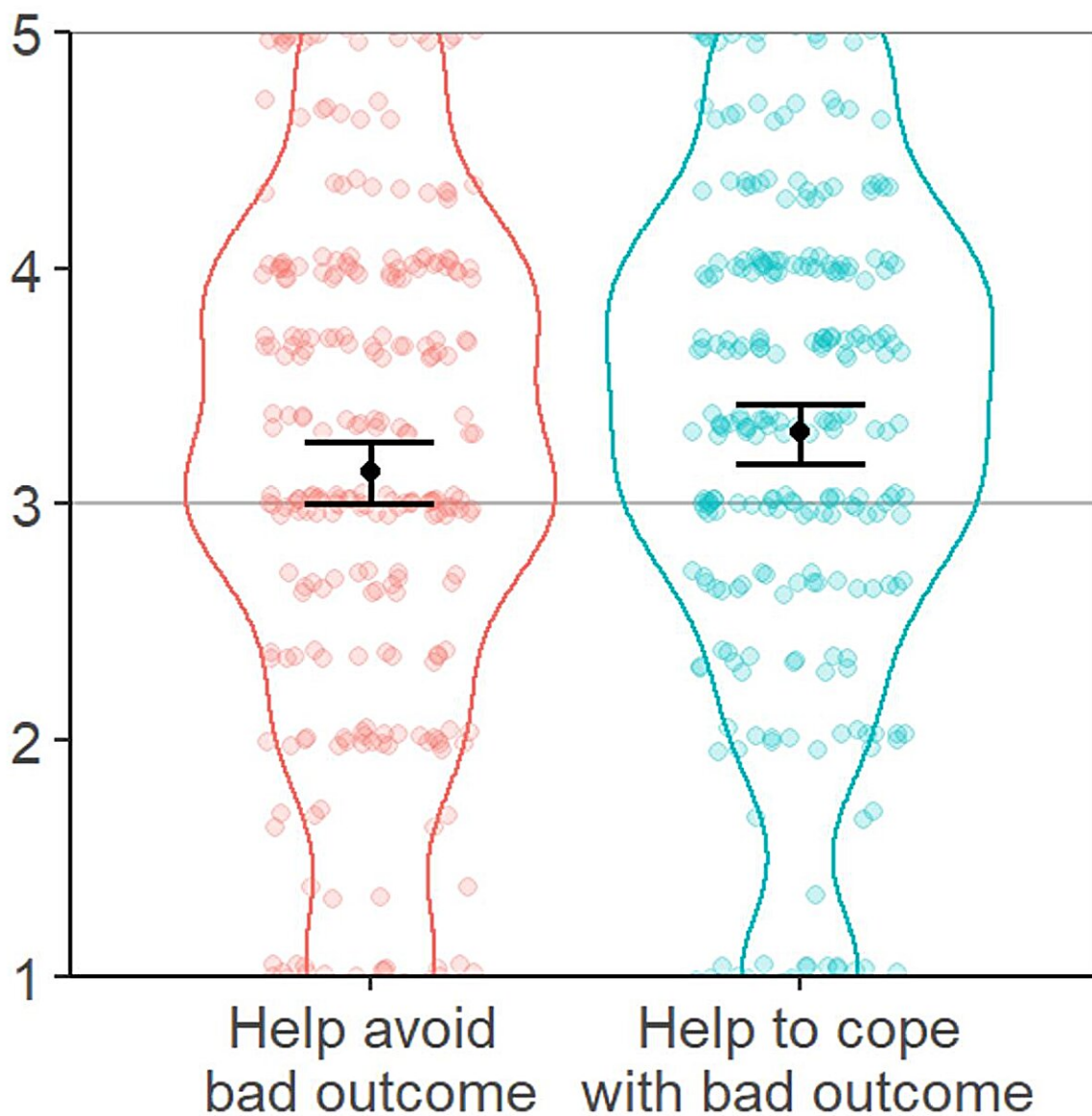


Thinking about God inspires risk-taking for believers, study finds

December 14 2023, by Emina Gamulin



Likelihood that God will help people who take risks to avoid bad outcomes, and cope with bad outcomes if they should occur. Black points indicate the mean (and 95% confidence interval), colored points represent individual participants' scores. The horizontal line indicates the scale's neutral midpoint. Credit: *PhysArXiv* (2023). DOI: 10.31234/osf.io/h74a3

Does thinking about faith make religious people more likely to take leaps? A new study lead by York University's Faculty of Health says yes, finding that participants were more likely to take risks when thinking about God as a benevolent protector.

"While the theoretical link between a belief in God and risk-taking has been around for a while, the methods previous studies employed to test this weren't the strongest, based on current best practices," says lead author Cindel White, an assistant professor in the Department of Psychology.

"Our carefully designed study confirmed that those who believe God will protect them from [negative consequences](#) will feel more confident in pursuing potentially dangerous or uncertain activities because of a perceived safety net."

[The study](#), titled "Do reminders of God increase willingness to take risks?" and published in the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, and written by White and collaborators from The University of British Columbia, Chloe Dean and Kristin Laurin—looked specifically at Christian Americans, who are known to believe in a God who protects them from harm. White also focused specifically on what she refers to as "morally neutral" risks.

"We know from previous research that religious people might be less

inclined to take risks that have immoral connotations, such as [drug use](#), and we also know that people might feel more encouraged by God to take on risks that are morally positive, like helping a person in need," White explains.

Instead, the researchers focused on scenarios involving recreational risks like mountain climbing and social and career-based risks, like moving to a new place to pursue a new job opportunity and finding a reliable link.

White says the findings don't tell us whether [religious people](#) are more likely to pursue [risks](#) than non-religious ones, but they may point to a sense of safety a belief in God provides.

"These results support the argument that as Christians go through their daily life, these beliefs about God can be used to make them feel better if they choose to pursue a risk. It does make sense that this relationship between beliefs about God and risky behavior is part of a broader set of religious beliefs that help people cope with uncertainty, fear, and stressors in [daily life](#) and help them see their lives in a more positive way and therefore, make them more likely to pursue opportunities that they might otherwise avoid."

More information: Cindel J.M. White et al, Do reminders of God increase willingness to take risks?, *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104539](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2023.104539). On *PsyArXiv* (2023). [DOI: 10.31234/osf.io/h74a3](https://doi.org/10.31234/osf.io/h74a3)

Provided by York University

Citation: Thinking about God inspires risk-taking for believers, study finds (2023, December 14) retrieved 9 May 2024 from

<https://medicalxpress.com/news/2023-12-god-risk-taking-believers.html>

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