

Study connects religious service attendance to less depression

November 14 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

(Medical Xpress) -- A new study published in the *Journal of Religion and Health* has connected the regular attendance of religious services with an increased level of optimism and a decreased risk of depression.

As a follow-up to a 2008 report from the [Women's Health Initiative](#) that showed regular attendance of [religious services](#) increased life expectancy, this new study looked at 92,539 post-menopausal women over the age of 50. The religious affiliations of all the participants, as well as their social and economic statuses, were diverse.

Led by Eliezer Schnall from the Yeshiva University in Manhattan, the results showed that out of the participants that attended services regularly, 56 percent were more likely to be optimistic about their lives. It also showed that 27 percent of the participants were less likely to be depressed than those who did not attend services regularly.

Of those that were included in the research, 34 percent of the women said they had not attended services within the last month. Of those that attended, 21 percent were less than once a week, 30 percent were weekly and 14 percent attended activities more than once a week.

After the 2008 study showed that regular attendance of religious services by women reduced their risk of death by 20 percent, the researchers wanted to see what factors may contribute to that risk reduction and believe they could be related to psychological factors. The Women's Health Initiative study began in 1991 and is funded by the U.S. National

Institutes of Health in an effort to track women's [health](#) and habits.

Schnall cautions that these results and their study apply only to women, and older women at that. The benefit of regular religious service attendance by younger women or men has not been looked at in this study. Past research has shown that older women tend to take more of a social role in religious activities and may gain the most from it.

More information: Psychological and Social Characteristics Associated with Religiosity in Women's Health Initiative Participants, [DOI: 10.1007/s10943-011-9549-6](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10943-011-9549-6)

Abstract

Measures of religiosity are linked to health outcomes, possibly indicating mediating effects of associated psychological and social factors. We examined cross-sectional data from 92,539 postmenopausal participants of the Women's Health Initiative Observational Study who responded to questions on religious service attendance, psychological characteristics, and social support domains. We present odds ratios from multiple logistic regressions controlling for covariates. Women attending services weekly during the past month, compared with those not attending at all in the past month, were less likely to be depressed [OR = 0.78; CI = 0.74–0.83] or characterized by cynical hostility [OR = 0.94; CI = 0.90–0.98], and more likely to be optimistic [OR = 1.22; CI = 1.17–1.26]. They were also more likely to report overall positive social support [OR = 1.28; CI = 1.24–1.33], as well as social support of four subtypes (emotional/informational support, affection support, tangible support, and positive social interaction), and were less likely to report social strain [OR = 0.91; CI = 0.88–0.94]. However, those attending more or less than weekly were not less likely to be characterized by cynical hostility, nor were they less likely to report social strain, compared to those not attending during the past month.

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