

Faith in God positively influences treatment for individuals with psychiatric illness

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Belief in God may significantly improve the outcome of those receiving short-term treatment for psychiatric illness, according to a recent study conducted by McLean Hospital investigators.

In the study, published in the current issue of *Journal of Affective Disorders*, David H. Rosmarin, PhD, McLean Hospital clinician and instructor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, examined individuals at the Behavioral Health Partial Hospital program at McLean in an effort to investigate the relationship between patients' level of belief in God, expectations for treatment and actual treatment outcomes.

"Our work suggests that people with a moderate to high level of belief in a higher power do significantly better in short-term psychiatric treatment than those without, regardless of their [religious affiliation](#). Belief was associated with not only improved psychological wellbeing, but decreases in depression and intention to self-harm," explained Rosmarin.

The study looked at 159 patients, recruited over a one-year period. Each participant was asked to gauge their belief in God as well as their expectations for [treatment outcome](#) and [emotion regulation](#), each on a five-point scale. Levels of depression, wellbeing, and self-harm were assessed at the beginning and end of their treatment program.

Of the patients sampled, more than 30 percent claimed no specific religious affiliation yet still saw the same benefits in treatment if their belief in a higher power was rated as moderately or very high. Patients with "no" or only "slight" belief in God were twice as likely not to respond to treatment than patients with higher levels of belief.

The study concludes: "... belief in God is associated with improved treatment outcomes in psychiatric care. More centrally, our results suggest that belief

in the credibility of [psychiatric treatment](#) and increased expectations to gain from treatment might be mechanisms by which [belief in God](#) can impact treatment outcomes."

Rosmarin commented, "Given the prevalence of religious belief in the United States – over 90% of the population – these findings are important in that they highlight the clinical implications of spiritual life. I hope that this work will lead to larger studies and increased funding in order to help as many people as possible."

Provided by McLean Hospital

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