

The Relationship Between Religion and Older Adults' Physical Health

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Many studies have argued that religiosity has a favorable effect on longevity, particularly for the older population. This had led to various social service agencies, health practitioners and religious communities to accommodate the religious needs of the older population (Barkan & Greenwood, 2003). Previous research has debated which aspects of religion such as service attendance, frequency of prayer, importance of a higher being can predict levels of physical health. If it does not boost, than it may have protective effects on health, according to researchers. The purpose of this study is to examine the influence of religiosity on physical health in older adults. The Health and Retirement Study (HRS) is a nationally representative survey of noninstitutionalized, pre-retired and retired adults in their later years of life in the United States. This data were used to analyze the relationship between physical health in older adults and religiosity. Religiosity, or levels of religious activity, was measured by the religious attendance and religious salience. Physical health was measured by respondents' self-rated health. The control variables included age, race/ethnicity, educational attainment, gender and marital status. Social support was also considered control variables since researchers suggest social relationships are one of the bases of religion (Krause & Cairney, 2009). Descriptive, bivariate and multivariate analyses were conducted. The data indicate that frequent religious attendance was associated with better perception of one's health. Higher levels of religious salience were associated with worse perception of health. The strongest finding was that higher educational attainment was associated with better ratings of health. Of the religious variables, higher religious attendance was a better predictor of better health ratings. Having feelings of isolation was associated effect with worse health, and also had a large effect on self-rated health.