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Adrienne Rogers and Daniel K Judd, Ancient Scripture

Introduction

There are over 4,000 religions in the world today. One of the core functions of religion is to help individuals find meaning and purpose in life. Several researchers have found that this religious function impacts psychological well-being, often for the better. This relationship between religious belief, practice, affiliation, and mental health has been an ongoing conversation that has generated controversy and debate.

Our research focuses specifically on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and how this religion affects the mental health of its members. Several studies have shown positive outcomes regarding Latter-day Saint membership and mental health. Also, social issues like LGBTQ matters and suicide, have inspired recent studies involving their connection with the Latter-day Saint faith. Many of these have reported negative findings. The purpose of our project is to inform others of the negative and positive findings in current research.

Methodology

For our literature review, we collected many peer-reviewed articles using EBSCO, a service that offers multiple research databases. We also completed an extensive search in Psychiatry Online, ScienceDirect, Scopus, Social Sciences Citation Index, Embase, Social Services Abstracts, and Sociological Abstracts. While reviewing articles, we applied specific research methods, for example, the “ancestry” method, which allowed us to find additional articles. Altogether, our search yielded 57 articles that met our inclusion criteria.

To be considered for our review, quantitative studies published between January 2005 and December 2017 contained samples and sub-samples of Latter-day Saints in a majority. They had to have measures of Latter-day Saint religiosity as defined by affiliation, beliefs, and practices. They also had to incorporate one or more operationally defined measures of mental health or mental illness. The mental health variables we utilized include: acculturation, anxiety, alcohol abuse, body image, coping, delinquency, depression, divorce, drugs, drug abuse, drug use, eating disorder, homosexuality, LGBT, LGBTQ, marriage, marital satisfaction, mental health, mental illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder, perfectionism, psychopathology, same-sex attraction, same-sex marriage, self-esteem, scrupulosity, sexuality, shame, social support, substance abuse, suicide, or well-being.

Results

Upon reviewing all 57 articles, we found that positive outcomes of Latter-day Saint religion and mental health are more significant than the adverse outcomes. We observed prominent negative outcomes within these mental health variables: substance abuse, LGBTQ variables, and perfectionism. For the sake of this report, I will provide a small sample of our findings: According to Steffen (2011), high spirituality within the Latter-day Saint faith was associated with greater coping skills and decreased concern with body image. Sandberg and Spangler (2007) also found Latter-day Saint women to have better body image than non-
LDS women. In a study on substance abuse (Merrill, Folsom, & Christopherson, 2005), it indicated that there was a beneficial relationship between religiosity and substance abuse; however, another study found increased use of prescription opioids among Latter-day Saint populations (Kerry, Goovaerts, Vowles, & Ingram, 2016). While several studies report high self-esteem among members, many of those who identify as LGBTQ reported lower levels of self-esteem and overall well-being (Dehlin, Galliher, Bradshaw, & Crowell, 2014).

**Discussion**

Our findings are consistent with the statement we made in our project proposal before our research, “We anticipate that positive results will continue to exceed negative results.” An active member of the Church will experience a positive impact on their mental health overall. This general finding does not discount the negative relationships that were found. Nevertheless, it is possible that some of the negative associations that were found in recent studies, especially those regarding the Church and LGBTQ issues, require more research. More research must be conducted on this topic overall to accurately claim some of these positive and negative outcomes.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, we emphasize the importance of understanding both the positive and negative factors concerning religious belief, practice, affiliation, and mental health. More specifically, it is essential the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints emphasize the strengths of their religion and acknowledge areas of weakness so they can gain the knowledge necessary to help struggling individuals. We are confident that our review can be a significant resource in recognizing and addressing these needs.


