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**EXAMINING THE DUAL NATURE OF POST-MISSION MENTAL HEALTH: AN ANALYSIS OF MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS AND POSITIVE WELL-BEING AMONG RETURNED MISSIONARIES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS**

Blaise Dobson

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Honors Thesis

EXAMINING THE DUAL NATURE OF POST-MISSION MENTAL HEALTH: AN  
ANALYSIS OF MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS AND POSITIVE WELL-BEING  
AMONG RETURNED MISSIONARIES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF  
LATTER-DAY SAINTS

By  
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requirements for University Honors

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Brigham Young University  
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## ABSTRACT

## EXAMINING THE DUAL NATURE OF POST-MISSION MENTAL HEALTH: AN ANALYSIS OF MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS AND POSITIVE WELL-BEING AMONG RETURNED MISSIONARIES OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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Bachelor of Science

This study explores mental health and general well-being amongst returned missionaries who served and completed full-time proselyting missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Through a combination of survey data and semi-structured interviews with 15 participants, the research investigated emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental changes experienced during their missions, and how those experiences affected them post-mission. Findings show that majority of participants viewed their mission as a positive experience overall, with few reporting on negative experiences. Very few studies have explored returned missionaries and their mental health; not touching on the specific population of missionaries who finish their missions versus the more common studies of missionaries who return early.



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Thank you to all my interview participants for providing your time to talk about your missions. It was a spiritual experience to hear all your amazing experiences, which not only helped in research participation, but with my own spiritual journey.

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## Introduction

Mental health and well-being are important aspects of overall health, especially when going through large transitions in life. One transition common amongst young members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints involves serving a full-time proselyting mission. The minimum age for serving is 18 years for men and 19 years for women. The duration of the mission depends on whether you are serving as a Sister or Elder. Female missionaries (Sisters) serve for 18 months, while male missionaries (Elders) serve for 24 months. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints recognizes that serving a full-time mission can be stressful, with specific schedules to follow and rules to obey (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, n.d.-a). Some full-time missionaries return home from their missions early due to mental health issues, and with this there have been many articles released by the church that have aided in the destigmatization of returning home early from a full-time mission (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, n.d.-b).

A study on early returned missionaries by Doty et al. (2015) shared that mental illness is one of the most common reasons missionaries return home early. The study shows that missionaries that returned early face more mental illness symptoms compared to those that serve their full mission (Doty et al., 2015). Some missionaries may also realize that the mission was more difficult than they were expecting; they may struggle with new responsibilities, unfamiliar situations, language barriers, etc. Doty et al. (2015) noted, “A propensity for mental illness may be exacerbated and may

affect a missionary's ability to function effectively" (p.36). With many mental illnesses being unreported to health professionals, there's an assumption that some missionaries leave the mission field with undisclosed struggles (De Page & Merckelbach, 2021).

Seeing correlations on how religiosity influences well-being, a study using members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was done by Allen and colleagues (2019) to see how one's personal faith had a positive influence on behavior. Main findings showed that one's personal religious commitment helped decrease social interaction anxiety, which helped with the de-escalation of other's behaviors (Allen et al., 2019). The study showed that those who exhibited service-oriented outlooks by paying attention to the welfare of others were overall more extroverted people. Serving a mission is influenced by the well-being of others around you. This involves the other missionary (companion) that you are assigned to be with during the mission, the members you attend church services with, and those investigating the church that you teach. While reported by missionaries from Doty et al. (2015) that a mission is a difficult feat with many responsibilities, it shows that serving others can also decrease distress due to the nature of directing your focus to everyone besides yourself, especially when your role is to be open and extroverted, leading to sharing the gospel (Allen et al., 2019).

Serving a full-time religious mission for a lengthy period involves consistent spiritual education through personal study, as the mission involves serving while also

teaching spiritual concepts from The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. With religiosity being a large focus on the mission, potential symptoms of scrupulosity could surface. A study by Allen et al. (2015) examined members of the church with strong beliefs and found that they exhibited a more fear-based approach due to their environment. According to Allen et al. (2015), “one’s religious concerns may also be influenced by ways the family environment may distort the individual’s beliefs or intensify the detrimental effects of scrupulosity” (p. 254). Missionaries also need to follow strict rules during their missions, which could follow a perfectionist ideology based on their mission environment of consistent spiritual growth. These rules involve following a set schedule, limited correspondence with family, having to walk/bike for miles, and being assigned a mission companion to accompany you everywhere.

While previous studies have measured the stresses of full-time missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints and examined religiosity among active church members; the present study seeks to fill the gap by investigating the mental health and well-being of recently returned missionaries who have completed their mission in full. The study focuses on both the challenges and strengths experienced by returned missionaries, aiming to provide insights into how significant religious service influences both positive and negative well-being.

## Present Study

The purpose of the study seeks to investigate the well-being of recently returned missionaries who have completed full-time religious missions for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The study will measure the experiences related to an increase of positive mental health related symptoms (e.g., confidence, self-esteem, optimism, resiliency) and negative mental health symptoms (e.g., anxiety, depression) following a returned missionary's full-time mission. Hypotheses include that returned missionaries will report positive mental health symptoms post-mission from surveys, with many experiences to share about how the mission has contributed to personal growth in one-on-one interviews. This study is significant as it addresses the mental health outcomes of a specific population that undergoes unique stressors and experiences. Understanding the mental health challenges when missionaries return home can contribute to the broader field of mental health in religious contexts, providing insights to faith-based service or therapy programs.

## Methods

### Sample

The sample for the survey portion of the project is 200 returned missionaries ages 20 to 26 years, who served full time proselyting missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Along with survey participants, 15 returned missionaries ages 20 to 26 years - who served full time proselyting missions for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints - participated in one-on-one interviews. Out of the 15 interviewees, 47% were female, and 53% were male. Materials

An online survey was created and distributed using Qualtrics software. The survey included questions about the returned missionaries' experiences during their missions, any mental health symptoms, and their life post-mission. See Appendix A for the full list of survey questions and the corresponding Likert scale responses.

Interviews included a list of questions for the participant to answer based on well-being during the mission, mission experiences, and exploring the differences of spirituality post mission. Interviews were semi-structured, allowing the researcher to ask follow-up questions for more detailed information. See Appendix B for the full list of interview questions. Interviews were recorded using the voice memo application for iPhone, then later transcribed.

### Procedures

For the survey portion of the study, all participants were recruited through social media, and were not location specific. One-on-one interview participants were

recruited through social media and through word of mouth. All participants for the interview needed to reside in Utah and be able to read and understand English.

### Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from both surveys and interviews. Interviews took 30 to 45 minutes in length for each participant. Narrative/thematic analysis was used to analyze qualitative interviews so patterns in participant responses could be identified. The positive experiences mentioned by participants and their impact on post-mission well-being will be analyzed, in comparison to other participants experiences. This analysis will be used to observe changes in mental health symptoms (both positive and negative) and to raise awareness about the well-being of full-time returned missionaries.

An Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) test was used to determine whether there were significant differences in the means of various mission experiences among three age groupings: youngest (ages 20-21), middle (ages 22-24), and oldest (ages 25-26). The comparison of means across the groups provided a way to assess which aspects of the mission experience vary significantly by age, thereby offering insights into how the different age groups felt impacted by their mission. Comparison of patterns between age groups and significant responses from each survey question will be used to find correlations and compare them to the interview responses.

## Results

### Qualtrics Survey

The Qualtrics survey resulted in a significant gender distribution, with female returned missionaries (Sisters) outweighing male returned missionaries (Elders) 106 to 62. The Sisters consistently outnumbered the Elders in all ages, with the difference in numbers becoming less pronounced as age increases. (See Figure 1)

The survey data indicated significant differences across most questions, with p-values  $< 0.05$ , suggesting statistical significance. However, there were two exceptions:

- Question 7: “Looking back on the mission, would you say you faced some interpersonal challenges?” had a p-value of .062
- Question 9: “Do you think that the mission had an impact on your overall well-being?” had a p-value of .618.

These p-values are greater than 0.05, indicating no significant differences. For the rest of the survey questions, the p-values were all below 0.05, indicating that the participants’ overall experiences on their missions were generally positive and contributed to their personal growth.

In comparing the age groups, the youngest group (ages 20-21) reported (M = 4.63) that the difficult parts of a mission contributed more to their overall growth than the oldest group (ages 25-26) (M = 4.17). The middle group (ages 22-24) showed (M = 4.69) that the mission improved their social and leadership skills than the youngest group (M = 4.48). The youngest (M = 4.73) and middle group (M = 4.73) both viewed



their mission as a more challenging feat compared to the oldest group ( $M = 4.40$ ).

Regarding mental health, the youngest group ( $M = 3.33$ ) reported a significantly more positive impact on their mental health compared to the oldest group ( $M = 2.51$ ). (See Table 1)

Figure 1. Survey Participants Bar Graph

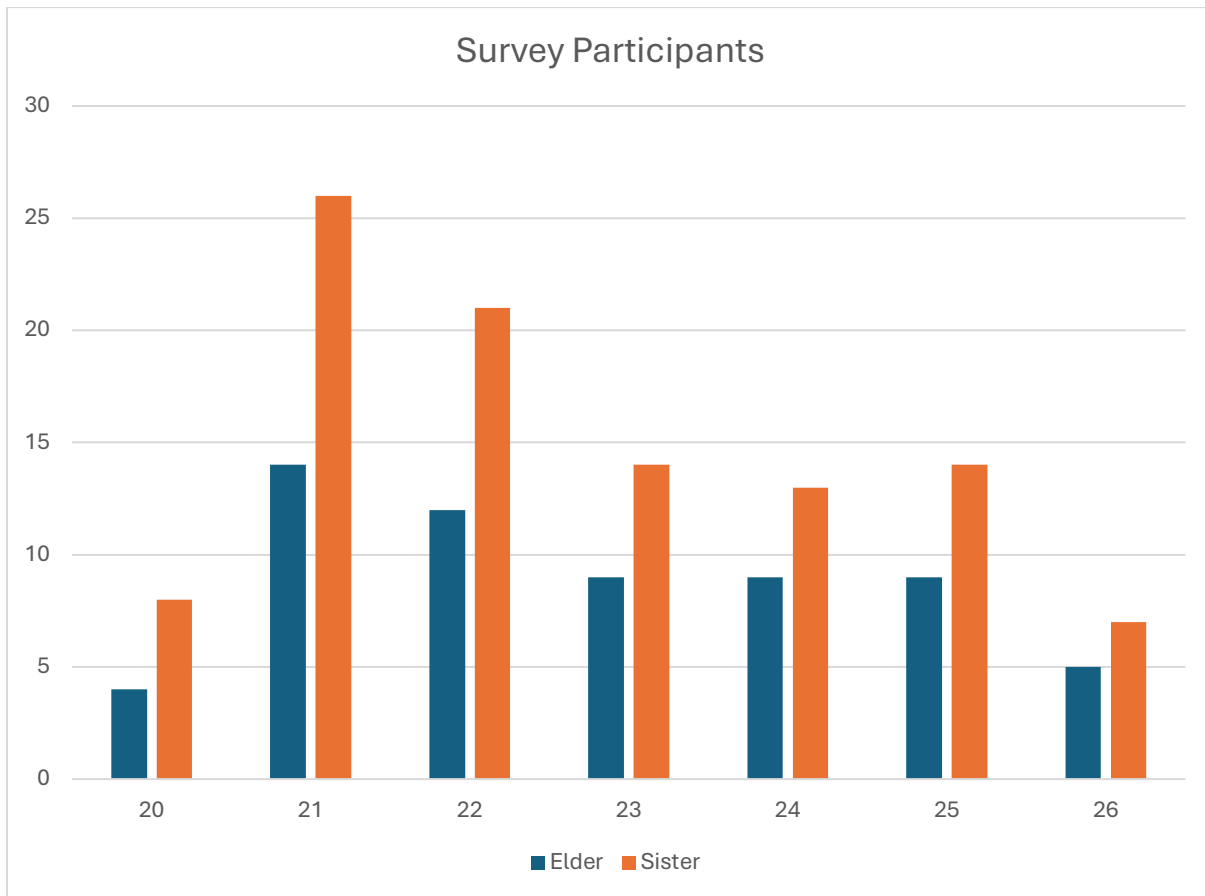


Table 1. Age Group Comparisons of Quantitative Questions

Question	M for Youngest Group (ages 20-21)	M for Middle Group (ages 22-24)	M for Oldest Group (ages 25-26)	F	p-value
1. Would you say that your mission was a positive experience for you?	4.65	4.49	3.80	2.26	.001*
2. Do you feel that your mission taught you some valuable life skills to use in the future?	4.87	4.78	4.26	1.08	.001*
3. Do you feel that your mission helped strengthen your relationship with your faith?	4.77	4.60	4.00	2.74	.002*
4. Do you see the mission as a challenging feat?	4.73	4.73	4.40	.01	.030*
5. Do you think the mission helped strengthen your social and leadership skills?	4.48	4.69	4.11	1.87	.004*
6. Do you believe that your mission helped influence your self-esteem in a positive way?	4.02	3.96	3.43	1.66	.045*
7. Looking back on the mission, would you say you faced some interpersonal challenges?	4.44	4.65	4.34	2.83	.062
8. Thinking about the difficult parts of the mission, would you say these have contributed to your overall growth as a person?	4.63	4.60	4.17	4.11	.018*
9. Do you think that the mission had an impact on your overall well-being?	4.60	4.53	4.43	.48	.618

10. Do you think the mission helped you be able to adapt to new situations today?	4.67	4.46	3.86	10.75	.000*
11. How did serving a mission impact your mental health?	3.33	3.00	2.51	3.91	.022*

\* : p-value less than 0.05, considered statistically significant

## One-on-one Interviews

In conjunction with the survey results, almost all 15 participants in the interview portion of research indicated that the mission was an overall positive experience, despite also being a challenging feat. Going through all interview questions and responses, I noticed there were many consistent answers. Interviews were semi-structured, providing additional experiences shared by participants. Each interview question will be sorted by response, noting the similarities of participants' experiences. See appendix B for the full list of interview questions.

### Interview Questions and Responses

1. Can you share your overall experience during your mission, highlighting the changes you saw in yourself, whether positive or negative?
  - a. Did you see any emotional changes?
    - 12 participants reported that their mission was difficult, but that they ultimately had a positive experience, as they learned to be spiritually and emotionally resilient.
    - 3 participants reported that the overall mission experience was negative due to emotional changes, specifically symptoms of depression and anxiety.
  - b. Did you see any physical changes?
    - 4 participants reported that they saw positive physical changes due to walking and/or biking every day. Conversely, 6 participants reported weight gain, attributing it to being fed often from church members.

2. How do you feel your mission contributed to changes in your overall well-being and mental health?
  - 6 participants reported experiencing struggles with depression and anxiety during the mission but were able to persevere. They noted that these experiences led to an improvement in their overall well-being.
  - 7 participants reported their mission contributed positively to their well-being.
  - 2 participants reported that their mission contributed negatively to their well-being, with depression being the primary negative mental health symptom.
3. Could you describe specific moments during your mission that had a positive impact for you?
  - 6 participants described that feeling God's presence and hand in missionary work had a positive impact.
  - 8 participants described positive moments with their mission companions.
  - 8 participants described positive moments with converts (those who they proselytize to and baptized).
  - 2 participants described positive moments with church members.
4. Regarding your spiritual well-being, what changes have you noticed since the mission?

- 8 participants reported not being as consistent with scripture study or prayer but attend church every week.
  - 4 participants reported that they are still active in the church, but now hold more nuanced beliefs.
  - 3 participants reported being consistent with study and prayer post mission.
5. Were there any challenges you faced that contributed to your personal growth?
- 7 participants reported that their relationships with other missionaries helped their personal growth.
  - 3 participants reported that learning a foreign language helped them to grow resilient.
  - 3 participants reported on the challenges of finding people to teach.
  - 1 participant reported that their depressive symptoms contributed to their growth.
  - 1 other participant reported that their anxiety symptoms contributed to their growth.
6. Were there any cultural or personal challenges during your mission?
- 12 participants reported that they encountered cultural challenges during the mission.
  - 1 reported the challenge was the culture of where they served.
  - 5 reported the challenge was the mission culture.

- 6 reported that it was a combination of both cultures.
  - 3 reported to have no challenges with either culture.
7. How would you say your mental health was halfway through the mission?
- 11 participants reported that their mental health was at its worst halfway through their missions
  - 3 reported they felt positive mental health symptoms
  - 1 reported to have felt neutral and not all negative nor positive.
8. Did you experience any emotional, physical, spiritual, or mental difficulties?
- 9 participants reported the mission had emotional difficulties.
  - 11 participants reported experiencing physical difficulties.
  - 7 participants reported experiencing spiritual difficulties.
  - 9 participants reported experiencing mental difficulties.
9. Have there been any skills you learned on the mission that you still use today?
- 14 reported using communication skills in social environments.
  - 5 reported using time management and planning.
  - 4 reported having more compassion for others.
  - 3 reported goal setting.
  - 2 reported being resilient, learning to push through difficult times.
10. Do you think about your time as a missionary often?
- 12 participants reported thinking about their mission

- 8 of the 12 reported say they only think about it when someone mentions missions, or they come across those from the mission on social media.
- 3 participants reported not thinking about their missions often.

**11. What advice would you give your younger missionary self if you could?**

- 10 participants reported they would tell their younger selves to relax, and that everything will be okay.
- 7 participants reported they would tell themselves to focus on the relationships with people you meet, and with Jesus Christ.
- 1 participant reported they didn't have advice, as they were satisfied with their mission experience.



## Discussion

This study explored the emotional, physical, spiritual, and mental health changes associated with serving a mission among returned missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The findings show that while most participants reported positive personal changes such as increased resilience and improved communication skills, a significant number also experienced challenges in terms of overall well-being. I will be addressing common participant responses and include participant's own quotes from the data gathered.

### Qualtrics Survey

I found that the survey results showed a large percentage of participants agreed that despite the difficulties of full-time missions, it has only helped strengthen their faith and personal skills. The survey provided insight into developmental benefits associated with mission service across different ages post mission. The youngest group had reported the difficult parts of the mission contributed to their growth in comparison to the oldest group. I find this would suggest that the younger participants have gotten off their mission more recently. Since their memories are still vivid, they may have not processed the difficult challenges from the mission as the older group has, causing the younger groups to see their challenges are more positive than negative. The middle age group reported greater improvement in social and leadership skills than the younger group, which could indicate that the younger group is still learning how to use those skills post mission. There is a big difference between mission

life and the norm, which could indicate that the younger group is still adjusting to navigating without structured guidance. Both the younger and middle age groups viewed their missions as more challenging versus the oldest group. This perception of challenge among the younger missionaries could be harnessed in a positive light of resilience building, while the older group could see it as a more harrowing experience. The survey results indicate a positive mental health impact on missions for the youngest group. This could be because they have recently completed their mission and may not have had enough time to fully reflect, leading them to primarily view their mission experience in a positive light.

#### One-on-One Interviews: Overall Experience

The findings suggest that age may play a significant role in how returned missionaries perceive their mission experience. The middle age participants might be at the stage in their personal development that they have been able to look back on their mission, after internalizing how they were able to accomplish something difficult. A study by Hui-Tzu Grace Chou et al. (2024) focused solely on returned missionaries and how their service in the mission could affect their self-esteem post-mission. The study recognized that accomplishing a mission as a whole, was a big confidence booster (Hui-Tzu Grace Chou et al., 2024). Self-esteem increased due to improving social and communication skills and building a spiritual relationship with God (Hui-Tzu Grace Chou et al., 2024). Participants in the present study also recognized these confidence boosters, which gave a sense of an overall uplifting experience.

Most participants recognized that their mission came equipped with its own challenges, yet 80% reported that the mission was an overall positive experience. Participants reported those challenges being one of the greatest they have faced:

“The mission is amazing, but not easy! It takes a lot out of you. It was the hardest time of my life, especially with adjusting to the food and language. I was very introverted and struggled with anxiety, but the mission is what helped me so much. I am a lot less negative, and I am such a positive person thanks to the mission.” (Participant 7)

“I would say positive, because I grew emotionally. I grew socially. Like before the mission, I was too scared to talk to people. I couldn't make a phone call at all to save my life. And on the mission, I did that every day. I had to get used to it. After a few months, I did great. I had difficult companions, difficult areas at times, but I was still able to work through that, and overall have a positive experience.” (Participant 2)

The 30% who reported that the missions were a more negative experience never blamed the mission itself as the cause of their mental health symptoms. While participants reported that their symptoms were triggered on the mission, it was never the reason why they were depressed or anxious. This finding was surprising, as I thought due to the number of participants reported struggling with mental health issues (40%) that at least one participant would be bitter

about the experience. One participant used to see their mission in a negative light, but has been able to process those experiences:

“I have depression and anxiety, and that triggered on my mission. It was on my mission where it got harder to operate. It was super stressful. I felt so stressed and not being able to find a time to relax, feeling guilty for the smallest things. That was throughout. It was hard to get over, now I have a more neutral viewpoint.” (Participant 6)

### Overall Well-Being

While 40% of participants reported struggles with depression and anxiety symptoms during their mission, they also reported that despite negative mental health symptoms, they believe their mission was a positive contribution to their well-being. Only 46% reported their mission contributed to their positive well-being. In a study by Doty et al. (2015) on missionaries who returned home early from their missions; stress was the main factor that resulted in the missionaries returning home. In this present study I saw that the mental health struggles were a result of stress due to mission rule expectations, difficult companionships, and having a difficult time finding people to teach. Despite those challenges, participants noted that the challenges became positive experiences that impacted their well-being:

“How I interacted with others is what impacted me the most. I had a mission companion who was stubborn like I was, and we would fight all

the time. But we both knew that we wanted to work hard. To make this work, we decided that we had to end each day with a hug and say, “I love you” to each other and apologize if we needed to.” (Participant 15)

“I always felt the spirit when I would teach people, which would help with forming relationships with members and converts. The mission had an expectation of inviting to baptism quickly into a lesson, which meant that numbers mattered more than people. Which I struggled with. When I became a leader, I was able to teach it differently, and that impacted me as I was able to help missionaries understand that it shouldn’t be numbers focused, but more personal.” (Participant 14)

“I was going through some spiritual doubts and anxiety around the time we were teaching someone I could relate with. It felt like I was teaching myself. She had the same questions I did. She was later baptized, and I was able to tell her how much she reminded me of me! She really made an impact for me.” (Participant 8)

What is noticeable from the participants responses is that they recognized that the mission is bound to give you stress and mental health symptoms due to the strict nature of scheduling, dress, free time, etc. The way the participants spoke about their missions in their speech was all positive; still noticing the bad experiences, but not letting those mask over the positives.

## Significant Moments and Spiritual Well-Being

Spiritual well-being post-mission was not as consistent for 53% of participants in comparison to their time on the mission. Serving in a full-time religious atmosphere means that you are consistently praying, reading scripture, and then teaching scripture. The data wasn't surprising when over half of the participants claimed that they often forget to pray and/or read. Majority reported having gotten off a "spiritual high" when they came home, as the mission was no longer the focus. 26.26% claimed that they are active members, but now see their faith in a more nuanced perspective; not believing every concept of the gospel. Participants shared their spiritual moments that strengthened their faith in God:

"My mission president encouraged us missionaries to spend some time outside. He recommended we visit a mountain. I really valued being outside because it helped my well-being. When we visited that mountain, I felt the other missionaries' love and God's love so strongly." (Participant 9)

"I didn't have a lot of strong spiritual experiences, but there was one time my mission companion and I followed a prompting. We were heading to our next teaching appointment but felt that we should stop by one of our investigators we were teaching, even though we didn't have an

appointment. When we got there, he was so happy to see us as he was praying for some help.” (Participant 12)

### Challenges and Growth

Despite the mission being one of the most difficult feats for a young member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, it is the most rewarding. One chooses to serve a mission in the church, and it lasts 18 to 24 months of a young person’s time, fully immersed in spreading the word of God. Not only is it a long time to serve, but it also puts you in a new role, in a new environment far from home. In a study done by Lafkas et al. (2021), women who served missions reported that they were grateful for the experiences since it molded them to become stronger, and that missions helped them learn they could do hard things. Having completed a full-time mission is a challenge already and runs the risk of missionaries’ returning home as studied by Doty et al. (2015). In the present study, participants openly shared their difficult times and how it offered them growth:

“I ended up training a lot of new missionaries. That new role forced me to be a leader, learn the gospel fast, and be able to teach that to my trainee. I learned a lot of patience and changed how I communicated. I had to change how I talked, as my mission companion would point out that I exhibited a short tone of voice. I didn’t even realize I was speaking “shortly” to others.” (Participant 5)

“There was one day where four people we were teaching had dropped us at the same time. I was already very discouraged that day, since it was the start of my mission, and I was getting used to how everything worked. I remember thinking, that you can’t grow any stronger of a testimony than right now. Then that day happened, it was raining, and we biked ten miles to see someone. They said no to hearing any more lessons. Then, we sat outside and said a prayer. It was a big testimony builder even though it was simple. The ride back I felt seen and heard by God, and I felt the spirit. After that I realize that a testimony grows throughout your life and doesn’t stop growing. It’s not just the mission that will give you spiritual growth, but everything that will happen after the mission.” (Participant 1)

### Skills and Reflections

Almost all participants reported that the main skills that they learned while on the mission were communication and social skills, an impressive 93.3%. Participants mentioned that they learned to be more sociable by talking to everyone they encountered, which was a direct way of finding new people to teach. Even those who said they were more extroverted had to teach and answer difficult questions from those investigating the church in a way that was constructive. Teaching gospel lessons, speaking in church, communicating with church members, and knocking on stranger’s doors are all new experiences that involve learning quickly what it means to preach like



a missionary. Research by Hui-Tzu Grace Chou et al. (2024) showed that missionaries became more confident in social settings as their mission progressed. Interview respondents reported that the mission taught them how to interact and befriend other people, not feeling afraid of rejection. (Hui-Tzu Grace Chou et al., 2024)

“Before the mission, I would wait for people to approach me first. I would expect others to start talking to me. Now, I look for people that may want to be talked to. I don’t expect people to approach me anymore.”

(Participant 13)

“People skills and communication. Before the mission I had no idea how to communicate. Now, I can talk to people with authority, and talk to people on the phone. Before, I totally couldn’t. It’s all thanks to forced interactions.” (Participant 1)

Participants were asked what advice they would give their younger missionary self, and 66.7% said they would tell themselves that they need to “chill out.” Half of those responses included telling your younger self to “have fun and not worry so much:”

“You need to relax, don’t be so hard on yourself.” (Participant 4)

“Chill out. Be okay with challenges happening. Remember that everyone is on your side. Remember that the Lord loves you and you will go through hard things.” (Participant 1)

### Strengths

The study overall had a lot of people participate. There were 200 survey subjects that contributed to a study topic that has not been well researched in the past. All subjects in the survey and the interview were anonymous so that they would feel comfortable sharing their personal experiences. Since the interview questions were semi-structured, this allowed for follow-up questions and interviewees to structure their answers as more conversational. Eliminating a strict interview structure proved to strengthen the

### Limitations

The sample does lack diversity in terms of cultural background and geographic location, as all interviewees were part of a homogenous group, and 14 out of 15 subjects were Caucasian. All were connected to the Utah County area, as it was a convenience sample. The study relied on self-reported data on both the survey and interview, which was subject to response bias. Although the interviews collected extensive information, a more structured format with specific questions could have minimized the need for additional questions and reduced the likelihood of interviewees repeating themselves.

### Future Direction

Future research could address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples, using a longitudinal study to track returned missionaries' well-being over time, to better understand specific impacts of missionary service. The present study makes a jump start to further investigate the positive and negative effects of full-time missionary work. The data collected could be a referencing tool in future studies, to compare findings and subject's experiences.

## Conclusion

Overall, the present study sought to fill a gap in the existing research of returned missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. This study can be the jumpstart for future research and the findings can be useful for mental health professionals supporting returned missionaries and their mental health difficulties. The research answered the initial hypothesis that participants report their mission being a positive experience, despite facing mental health challenges. While participants in the present study reported missionary life being a stressful environment with new responsibilities to take on, participants recognized that the mission fostered resilience and positive personal growth.

A suggestion for assisting returned missionaries could include the opportunity for post-mission classes offered by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Currently there are lesson plans for teachers in mission prep classes, helping future missionaries understand their purpose on the mission and feel prepared for it. (Mission

Preparation, n.d.) Some participants in the interviews mentioned they often felt lost once they returned home, no longer having a routine in place like the mission provided. Having post-mission classes would help return missionaries get adjusted to normal life. This would involve creating new routines, setting new life goals, helping missionaries maintain their spirituality (which over half of the interview participants said they were slacking in), and provide resources for mental health.

“When I came home it was really hard. Not having that responsibility, strict schedule, routine, or purpose. I was trying to figure out school, dating, work and life. When I first came home, I was really depressed for a while. I’m okay now, but for a year I was struggling” (Participant 1)

“I feel like you are on a spiritual high during the mission, so when I came back, it was rough. I feel like I am a lot more nuanced in my beliefs. On the mission I felt like there was only one way, but now I see that everyone is on their own path. I know I don’t know everything, but I am hopeful everything will work out.” (Participant 2)

Providing post-mission classes for returned missionaries could lead to missionaries seeing their mission as a positive experience, while helping them recognize that they may need mental health resources to process their experiences. Having these classes for returned missionaries could help maintain spiritual habits such as scripture reading, church attendance, and prayer which could lead to increases in personal spiritual

fulfillment. Maintaining a routine following an extensive religious service mission will assist in return missionaries finding newfound purpose, while still having the opportunity to mimic the mission's characteristics of effective planning and goal setting. By addressing both the challenges and positive impacts of mission experiences, offering structured post-mission support, and fostering ongoing spiritual and mental health resources, returned missionaries can achieve greater personal fulfillment and well-being.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. Would you say that your mission was a positive experience for you?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
2. Do you feel that your mission taught you some valuable life skills to use in the future?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
3. Do you feel that your mission helped strengthen your relationship with your faith?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
4. Do you see the mission as a challenging feat?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
5. Do you think the mission helped strengthen your social and leadership skills?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
6. Do you believe that your mission helped influence your self-esteem in a positive way?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
7. Looking back on the mission, would you say you faced some interpersonal challenges?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
8. Thinking about the difficult parts of the mission, would you say these have contributed to your overall growth as a person?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree
9. Do you think that the mission had an impact on your overall well-being?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree



10. Do you think the mission helped you be able to adapt to new situations today?  
a. Strongly agree b. Agree c. Neutral d. Disagree e. Strongly Disagree

11. How did serving a mission impact your mental health?  
a. Significant positive impact b. Somewhat positive impact c. No  
impact  
d. Somewhat negative impact e. Significant negative impact

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. When did you serve your mission?
2. Where did you serve? Did you learn a language?
3. Can you share your overall experience during your mission, highlighting the changes you saw in yourself, whether positive or negative?
  - a. Did you see any emotional changes?
  - b. Did you see any physical changes?
4. How do you feel your mission contributed to changes in your overall well-being and mental health?
5. Could you describe specific moments during your mission that had a positive impact for you?
6. Regarding your spiritual well-being, what changes have you noticed since the mission?
7. Were there any challenges you faced that contributed to your personal growth?
8. Were there any cultural or personal challenges during your mission?
  - a. How did you cope with those challenges?
9. How would you say your mental health was halfway through the mission?
10. Did you experience any emotional, physical, spiritual, or mental difficulties?
  - a. How were these difficulties overcome?
11. Have there been any skills you learned on the mission that you still use today?
12. Do you think about your time as a missionary often?
  - a. What do you reflect on?
13. What advice would you give your younger missionary self if you could?

