Sociocultural Factors in Adolescent Depression

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Background: Several studies of adults and adolescents have uncovered relationships between religion/spirituality and depression. Proposed mechanisms through which religion may impact depression include decreased substance use and enhanced social support. Little investigation of these topics has occurred with adolescent psychiatric patients, among whom depression, substance use, and social dysfunction are common.

Method: 147 subjects from two psychiatric outpatient clinics, aged 12-18, completed the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II), a multidimensional survey of religion/spirituality, a scale of substance abuse, and an inventory measuring perceived social support. Multiple regression models were used to characterize relationships between depression and religion, controlling for substance abuse and social support.

Results: Daily Spiritual Experiences, Forgiveness, Positive Religious Coping, Negative Religious Coping, Positive Religious Support, Negative Religious Support, Negative Religious History, Organizational Religiousness, and Self-Ranking as religious/spiritual showed strong relationships to BDI-II score. When perceived social support and substance abuse measures were added to the model, only Forgiveness, Negative Religious Support, Loss of Faith, and Negative Religious Coping retained significant relationships to BDI-II.

Conclusions: Several aspects of religiousness/spirituality appear to relate to depressive symptoms in adolescent psychiatric patients. Findings suggest that perceived social support and substance abuse account for some of these correlations but do not completely explain the relationships.