

“Religion/Spirituality and Adolescent Psychiatric Symptoms: A Review”

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Background: A growing literature points to a potential protective effect of religiosity on the mental health of adults. However, developmental differences may limit generalization of such findings to younger populations. Research postulating a connection between religiousness and mental health in adolescents has also emerged. The current article reviews the literature on religion/spirituality as it pertains to adolescent psychiatric symptoms.

Method: One hundred and fifteen articles were reviewed that examined relationships between religion/spirituality and adolescent substance use, delinquency, depression, suicidality, and anxiety. Each study was assigned a score indicating the quality of methodology used. A Kruskal-Wallis test was used to detect any association between methodology score and results.

Results: Ninety-two percent of articles found at least one significant ($p < .05$) relationship between religiousness and better mental health. The level of methodological rigor showed substantial variance but did not appear to systematically bias findings in any particular direction. Evidence for relationships between greater religiousness and less psychopathology is best for the area of teenage substance use, while most lacking in research on anxiety disorders. Measurement of religion/spirituality was heterogeneous.

Conclusions: Results suggest that, while a connection between adolescent substance use and religion has been adequately established, further research on the relationship of religion/spirituality to delinquency, depression, suicidality, and anxiety is warranted.

Measurement of religiousness/spirituality should be more standardized and multidimensional, future analyses should control for substance use, and mechanisms through which religion may impact mental health should be sought. Measurement recommendations, research priorities, and clinical implications are discussed.