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Quiz: For better or worse, religion and mental health

New studies indicate that religion can play a major role in mental health. But not all expressions of faith lead to happier, more peaceful lives. Take our quiz to test your knowledge of the relationship between religion and emotional wellbeing.

by [David Briggs](#)



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November 8, 2011

Don't worry. Be happy. Know that God loves you.

[Take the quiz](#)

In a world of increasing economic and political anxiety, the three-step formula above appears to be a key to good mental health, new research indicates.

The [2010 Baylor Religion Survey](#) found that adults who strongly believe they have a warm relationship

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with God have, on average, fewer mental health issues.

A growing body of research finds a generally positive relationship “between aspects of religious involvement and a wide range of mental health outcomes,” researchers Christopher Ellison, Robert Hummer, Amy Burdette and Maureen Benjamins write in the new book “[Religion, Families and Health](#).”

But research is also revealing that not all religious individuals experience better mental health. And studies have shown that greater doubt about religion or fears of the judgment of an angry God are associated with worse mental health.

In a separate chapter in “Religion, Families and Health,” Neal Krause of the University of Michigan reports on studies by him and others revealing that greater involvement in religion is associated with less depression.

“Mental health problems are fairly prevalent across the life course,” Krause writes. “There is now convincing evidence that religion may play a role in helping people either avoid them, or deal more effectively with them when they arise.”

For example, respondents who strongly believed that God is responsive to them or that God’s love never fails reported fewer mental health issues than the general population, while those who strongly believed that God is impersonal or inconsistent reported more mental health concerns.

In related findings, adults who believed in a very “engaged God” who is involved in the world and people’s lives reported a third fewer concerns related to social anxiety and 25 percent fewer concerns related to paranoia.

In contrast, respondents who believed in a very “judgmental God” who is punishing and angered by sin reported 45 percent more concerns related to social anxiety and 37 percent more concerns related to paranoia.

Although research has shown that being part of a religious community can have a beneficial impact, church leaders are challenged by the findings that depressed individuals are less likely to attend church.

The stigma related to mental illness, along with the impression congregations may give that unhappiness is a sign of a lack of faith, can keep people suffering from mental health issues at home, says Baylor University sociologist Jerry Park.

The bottom line: Religious communities can make a difference by reaching out to people with mental health issues and providing a welcoming and caring environment.