"Identifying as Religious" and "Strength of Religious Commitment" Predict Substance Use Rates, but "Type of Religion" Does Not

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Introduction

Previous studies have shown religiosity to predict health outcomes, and some studies have found religious beliefs, religious service attendance, and religious affiliation, all measured in varying ways, to predict substance use. The current study sought to confirm previous findings. If religiosity is found to be a protective factor against substance use that is robust across behaviors and samples, screening and intervention efforts could be enhanced.

Method

Participants

949 college students

- 68% Male
- 85% White
- 21 countries represented
- 65.6% Protestant
- 17% High in measured religious commitment

Measures and Procedures

All undergraduate students enrolled in the Sona Systems participant pool at a Southern Appalachian University were invited to complete this online survey during spring 2013 and fall 2014. Extra credit was awarded for participation. Cases were omitted if inadequate time was spent (<5 min) or inconsistent answers were given (answering items in opposite directions or entering obviously random responses e.g., 54 years of school, 54 children).

Logistic regression was used to determine the degree to which Religious Commitment and Religious Affiliation predicted probability of use of various substances. No covariates were used because no demographic variables were significantly related to any of the substance use variables.

Results

- Odds of substance use were significantly higher for the students who did not report being high in religious commitment
- Odds ratios for substance use ranged from 2.67 to 7.64

- Odds of substance use was significantly higher for students with no religion as compared to students reporting affiliation as a Protestant
- Students reporting affiliation as Muslim had greater odds of smoking, but lower odds of alcohol use than those reporting Protestant affiliation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Number of Items</th>
<th>Scoring</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Religious Affiliation</td>
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<td>Percentage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious Commitment</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>High/Not high</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illicit drug use</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (past 30 days)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alcohol (moderate)</td>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alcohol (heavy)</td>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Smoking</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

- High Religious Commitment predicts low risk of all types of substance use
- Lacking any Religious Affiliation appears to predict higher risk substance use
- Particular Religious Affiliation was predictive of few areas of substance use

References


Poster presented at the 36th Annual Meeting of the Society of Behavioral Medicine, San Antonio, TX, April 2015