



Spirituality Is Linked To Better Mental Health

According to a study conducted by researchers at the University of Missouri, spirituality often improves health regardless of a person's health. The study is published in the *Journal of Religion and Health*.

The team highlight that healthcare providers could tailor treatments and rehabilitation programs to accommodate an individual's spiritual inclinations.

Dan Cohen, assistant teaching professor of religious studies at MU, explained:

"In many ways, the results of our study support the idea that spirituality functions as a personality trait. With increased spirituality people reduce their sense of self and feel a greater sense of oneness and connectedness with the rest of the universe. What was interesting was that frequency of participation in religious activities or the perceived degree of congregational support was not found to be significant in the relationships between personality, spirituality, religion and health."

The team examined the results of three surveys in order to find out if correlation existed among participants' self-reported mental and physical health, personality factors, and spirituality in Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Catholics, and Protestants.

The team found that in all five faiths, spirituality was associated to better mental health, specifically lower levels of neuroticism and greater extraversion. The only spiritual trait predictive of mental health after personality variables were considered was forgiveness.

Cohen, said:

"Our prior research shows that the mental health of people recovering from different medical conditions, such as cancer, stroke, spinal cord injury and traumatic brain injury, appears to be related significantly to positive spiritual beliefs and especially congregational support and spiritual interventions. Spiritual beliefs may be a coping device to help individuals deal emotionally with stress."

According to Cohen, spirituality could help an individual's mental healthy by lowering their self-centeredness and developing their sense of belonging to a larger whole.

Spirituality is encouraged in many different faith traditions, although they use different names for the process. A Christian monk wouldn't say he had attained Nirvana, nor would a Buddhist monk say he had communed with Jesus Christ, but they may well be referring to similar phenomena.

Cohen explains: "Health workers may also benefit from learning how to minimize the negative side of a patient's spirituality, which may manifest itself in the tendency to view misfortune as a divine curse."

Religious-based counseling, meditation, and forgiveness protocols may improve spirituality-based beliefs, practices, and coping strategies in positive ways, according to the researchers.

Cohen believes that the selflessness that comes with spirituality improves characteristics that are vital for fostering a global society based on the virtues of peace and cooperation.

Written by Grace Rattue