

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Relations Between Youths' Conceptions of Spirituality and Their Developmental Outcomes

James, A. G., & Fine, M. A. (2015). Relations between youths' conceptions of spirituality and their developmental outcomes. *Journal of Adolescence*, 43, 171-180. doi:10.1016/j.adolescebce,2015.05.014

SUMMARY: Spirituality among youth has repeatedly been shown to be associated with positive youth development, conceptualized as including components of competence, confidence, character, connection, caring, and contribution. This study examined views of spirituality in relation to positive youth development to assess whether different views had different effects on positive youth development. Findings suggest that, overall, more coherent views of spirituality are associated with more positive youth development.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth's views of what it meant to be spiritual were characterized by three subtypes: finding meaning in life (n = 683), being generous (n = 294), and having ambiguous meaning (n = 865).
- Youth with a finding meaning or generosity view of spirituality reported greater competence, character, connection, caring, and contribution than those with ambiguous views of spirituality.
- Youth with a finding meaning view of spirituality reported greater competence and confidence than those with generosity or ambiguous views of spirituality.
- Views of spirituality did not impact positive youth development components at a one-year follow-up.

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Collaborate between military youth programs and spiritual organizations to provide military youth opportunities to explore their spiritual beliefs
- Facilitate support groups for military youth who are unsure of their spiritual beliefs

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Provide activities to allow military youth to express and explore their spiritual beliefs with peers
- Disseminate information regarding spirituality and positive youth development to military parents

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend integrating spiritual exploration into existing programs for military youth
- Encourage education for service providers who work with military youth around the potential effects of spirituality and coherent views on positive youth development

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METHODS

- Participants included youth from a larger, longitudinal 4-H study of positive youth development, which recruited more than 8,000 youth from an after-school program.
- Youth completed annual youth development surveys for eight years.
- Differences in youth's views of spirituality, and their associations with each positive youth development component, were examined.

PARTICIPANTS

- Participants included 1,842 youth, 64% female and ages 10 through 18 years, who completed the spirituality question of the 4-H survey in 2008.
- Youth identified as White (79%), Latino (6%), Black (5%), or Multiracial (3%).
- Participants primarily reported their religious affiliations as Atheist (14%), Protestant (39%), Catholic (27%), or other (18%); less than 2% reported being Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu.

LIMITATIONS

- The sample included primarily White, high socioeconomic status, Christian youth in after-school programs, and results may not generalize to other groups of youth.
- No analyses regarding the relationship between each spiritual view and positive youth development were completed; only comparisons between groups were analyzed.
- Youth's spiritual views were coded into three groups based on a single question.
- Cross-sectional data do not allow for an analysis of the directions of effects between spirituality and positive youth development.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Explore the effects of parent spiritual views on child views and positive youth development
- Examine how spiritual views change across youth development, particularly during adolescence
- Investigate differences in spiritual views between military and civilian youth

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