

Putting Research to Work for Military Families



Focus:
Civilian

Religion as a Resource for Positive Youth Development: Religion, Social Capital, and Moral Outcomes

King, P. E., & Furrow, J. L. (2008). Religion as a resource for positive youth development: Religion, social capital, and moral outcomes. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *S*(1), 34-49. doi:10.1037/1941-1022.S.1.34.

SUMMARY: Urban youths completed questionnaires in their school classrooms to examine how social interactions, trust, and shared vision that youth have with adults surrounding religion influence youth's moral behavior. Religiously active youth report more frequent interactions with nonfamilial adults. The influence of religion participation on youth moral behavior is mediated through trusting interactions with adults.

KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth who are more religiously active have a more significant experience of intergenerational community compared to less religiously active youths. These youth active in religion are more likely to interact with, trust, and share similar perspectives with a nonfamilial adult.
- The influences of religion importance and participation on youth empathy and altruism are mediated through trusting interactions with adults, friends, and parents.
- There was little variance in the fit of the model across gender, ethnicity, grade cohort, and family structure.
- For Latino/Latina and female youth, social trust and interaction were more characteristic of social capital than shared viewpoints (which is more important for Black and male youth).

IMPLICATIONS FOR MILITARY PROFESSIONALS:

Military professionals could:

- Facilitate support group for military children that offer opportunities to explore religion and religious activities
- Collaborate with organizations connected with military children to explore other ways to increase youth's social capital and moral outcomes besides religious activities

IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAMS:

Programs could:

- Offer support programs for military youths that foster trusting relationships with non-familial adults who share similar values and beliefs
- Educate military youth about the importance of values, goals, and beliefs, and incorporate activities that encourage reflection and discussion about these topics

IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICIES:

Policies could:

- Recommend the development of programs for youth that allow opportunities to be altruistic, such as creating infrastructures for volunteer activities
- Recommend professional development of youth program workers regarding how to support the healthy development of military children's personal values, goals, and beliefs

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METHODS

- Students at one urban public high school in Los Angeles completed a questionnaire as an in-class assignment; 65% of eligible participants responded.
- Only the data from students who reported having a significant adult in their life was included in the study.
- The participants completed measures of religiousness, social capital, social interaction, trust, shared vision (shared values, beliefs and goals in their relationships), altruism, and empathy.

PARTICIPANTS

- Seven hundred thirty-five high school students participated (53% female).
- The average age of participants was 15.89 years (SD = 1.24 years).
- The majority of participants were either Black (39%) or Latino (39%).

LIMITATIONS

- Students without significant adults were not included, so these results may not generalize to this group.
- The measures were self-report which contains inherent limitations.
- The sample was in Los Angeles, so the extent to which these findings apply to youths in non-urban, non-California areas is unknown.

AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research could:

- Use multiple informants and non-self-report measures to examine the relationships among observed altruism, empathy, and religiosity with military youth
- Include religious beliefs and experiences as components of religiosity
- Examine the influence of religious activity on social capital and moral outcomes with a sample of military youth

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