



# FAITH AND RELIGIOUSNESS

## OVERVIEW

Faith has a variety of meanings in terms of spiritual health including loyalty to and trust in a higher supernatural power, entity or entities. Spiritual faith is often related to a system of religious beliefs, and has strong ties to social health as it typically unites large groups of individuals. Though faith and religiousness tend to be separate from scientific explanation, there have been connections made between faith and health. Specifically, faith and religiousness can shape one's beliefs and perceptions of health including the use of medications, remedies, treatments, and other forms of care.<sup>1</sup> These beliefs can determine one's participation in or abstinence from health behaviors such as alcohol and drug use, sexual activity, smoking, or taking medication.<sup>2</sup> Each of these behaviors influenced by faith can in turn impact one's physical health.

Faith and religiousness can be a unifying force which can influence one's social connections and interactions at the human level. Depending on one's beliefs, a faith-based relationship with a supernatural entity can have traits that are quite similar to those found in interpersonal relationships, despite being beyond human interaction. The similarities of a faith-based relationship can include the positive feelings of compassion, support, and trust as well as the negative feelings of fear, judgement, or pressure.<sup>3</sup> Much like human relationships, the feelings derived from the relationship with a supernatural entity can have positive or harmful effects.

Faith and religiousness have been connected to aspects of mental health including anxiety, depression, and stress. For some, having a strong sense of faith can result in the experiencing of fewer symptoms of anxiety and depression.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, traits often associated with faith and religiousness such as attention, character, discipline, focus, motivation, and will-power can serve as coping mechanisms for stress.<sup>4</sup> It is also believed that teachings of hope and meaning associated with faith can improve one's outlook and optimism, as recovery has shown to be better among patients with stronger levels of religious involvement.<sup>5</sup>

## RESOURCES

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/3446212>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/367/the-influence-of-religion-on-health>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.livescience.com/52197-religion-mental-health-brain.html>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/367/the-influence-of-religion-on-health>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1305900/>

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information, tools, and resources about faith and religiousness, visit:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/>

© Copyright Whatismyhealth, February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2017

<http://www.religionfacts.com/big-religion-chart>

<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2014/03/140328103043.htm>