

REVIEW OF THE EFFECT OF RELIGION ON ANXIETY

The objective of this article is to review the medical literature regarding the influence of personal religious belief and religious-based activities on anxiety. Studies were reviewed evaluating anxiety and the effect of religion in peer reviewed medical literature from 1966 to May 2015 by using search terms in PubMed and Cochrane data bases. There were 32 studies included. This review showed, in almost every study, that religion in general, religious training, spirituality, faith, prayer, religious community and worship were associated with reduced anxiety (stress). These effects were observed in both healthy individuals and in various patient populations. In addition, a number of studies demonstrated that religious based treatment intervention was helpful in the treatment of anxiety. This review suggests that religious practice and belief may assist individuals suffering with anxiety.

Table 1: Summary of articles

Ref	Country	Population	Conclusions
General Anxiety			
14	USA	73 adult male inmates	Religious experiences and God positively affected emotional health
15	Greek	123 nursing students	Religion helped lower depression, stress and anxiety
16	USA	344 pregnant women	Religiosity and spirituality were associated with reduced anxiety
17	Iran	285 medical students	Religion offered protection against anxiety and depression
18	Thailand	21 patients with anxiety symptoms	Counseling with Buddhist principles benefited many of the patients who had anxiety symptoms
Prayer & Christian community interventions			
19	USA	8 undergrads	Being prayed for helped reduce anxiety
20	USA	44 women with depression & anxiety	Prayer interventions decreased depression/anxiety, increased optimism and produced greater levels of spiritual experience
21	N/A	406 subjects	Subjects of prayer improved in self-esteem, anxiety and depression
22	USA	50 African Americans	Church-based social support alleviated racial anxiety
Religious based treatment			
23	USA	43 older women, survivors of trauma	Spiritually focused intervention group had lower depressive, anxiety and physical symptoms.
24	USA	66 adults	For Christians, having religious/spiritual based counseling was important for anxiety/depression
25	Canada	18 with GAD	Multi-faith spiritual based interventions are effective treatments for GAD
26	Canada	23 with GAD	Spiritually based intervention had great efficacy in improving anxiety and enhancing spiritual wellbeing
27	Malaysia	203 religious with anxiety or depression	Religious and sociocultural components in treatment helped anxiety and depressive symptoms
28	USA	124 Jews with elevated levels of stress/worry	Participants improved in stress, worry, depression and intolerance of uncertainty
Death anxiety			
29	USA	635 adults	Religiousness inversely associated with death anxiety; religious doubt had positive association
30	UK	133 Christian Chinese university students	Intrinsically motivated religiosity lowered anxiety toward death/dying of oneself or of someone close.
31	Pakistan	132 Pakistanis	Women, older people and less religious people were more anxious about different dimensions of death
32	UAE	85 drug dependent Arabic males	Death anxiety was higher in drug abusers, especially if they were not practicing a religion
Anxiety in illness			
33	USA	210 patients with advanced illness	Negative religious experiences were associated with symptoms of anxiety and depression
34	Tanzania	135 Christian or Muslim adults with HIV	Religiosity was related to reduced depression, anxiety and stress
35	USA	1071 diverse adult HIV patients	Prayer could be beneficial, particularly for older African Americans, Hispanics and females

36	USA	10 women receiving chemotherapy	Personal prayer benefited their emotional wellbeing, anxiety, depression and faith
37	Australia	999 cancer patients	Intercessory prayer made small, but significant improvements in the patients' wellbeing
38	Poland	180 adult end stage breast cancer women	Religion was an effective coping factor with anxiety
39	UK	85 cancer patients	Greater spirituality associated with lower anxiety/depression, no correlation with religious wellbeing and strength of belief
40	USA	130 breast cancer survivors	Belief in an engaged God correlated to wellbeing, lowered stress, less concern of cancer recurrence
41	N/A	114 adults diagnosed with cancer	High levels of spirituality were associated with lower levels of anxiety
42	Australia	100 cancer patients	Negative spiritual coping was associated with greater anxiety scores
43	Iran	70 Muslim coronary artery bypass grafting patients	Religious training reduced anxiety compared to standard care group
44	USA	262 patients who underwent open heart surgery	Prayer, optimism and hope predicted less depression; religiousness, marital status and hope predicted less anxiety
45	USA	166 coronary artery bypass graft patients	Chaplain visits increased positive religious coping and decreased negative religious coping, but didn't affect anxiety

USA = United States of America; UK = United Kingdom; UAE = United Arab Emirates; GAD = generalized anxiety disorder

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