



The Association Between Childhood Religion and Adult Substance Use



Clio Gourevitch, Applied Data Analysis, Wesleyan University

Introduction

- Prior literature shows that those who are currently members of religions that promote abstinence from alcohol are significantly less likely to drink alcohol and, more generally, those who are currently religious, even in non-abstinence promoting religions, are about half as likely to drink as those who are not (Luczak et al., 2014).
- It was also found that among recovering addicts, religious faith was common and correlated to more positive outcomes in substance abuse recovery (Pardini et al., 2000).
- While this research is vitally important, there is a notable lack of research into the affects of time on the relationship between religion and substance use and therefore this study uses a longitudinal sample.

Research Questions

- Does childhood religiosity, belief in sacred scriptures, relate to one's later substance use and abuse?
- Does one's gender moderate this relationship?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents were taken from the 1st and 5th waves of The U.S. National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (ADDHEALTH).
- The 1st wave surveyed 90,118 adolescent participants between 7th and 12th grade and the 5th wave surveyed those same participants when they were in and around their 30's and 40's.

Measures

- The ChildhoodRelig variable uses the participants' responses to the question "Do you agree or disagree that the sacred scriptures of your religion are the word of God and are completely without any mistakes?" The four responses to this were "agree," "disagree," "no scriptures," and "no religion."
- The SubstanceAbuseTotal variable is a composite score of participants usages of a variety of substances. The amount of each substance that could be considered abuse was taken into account. A score of 0 implies no substance abuse and a score of 10 would be the highest possible amount of substance abuse measured in this study.

- The variable of gender was a binary variable, there were only two given responses: "male," and "female."

Results

Bivariate

- ANOVA indicates that ChildhoodRelig and SubstanceAbuseTotal are significantly associated ($p=.02$).
- The "no scriptures" response visually appears to be an outlier

ChildhoodRelig and SubstanceAbuseTotal

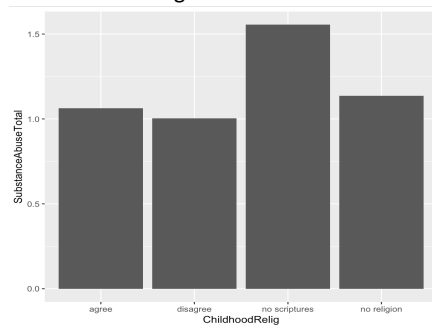


Figure 1: Substance Abuse Total in relation to Childhood Religion

Multivariate

- Multiple Linear Regression shows that the response "no scriptures" to ChildhoodRelig (Beta=0.46, CI 0.10-0.83, $p=.01$) was significantly different from the ChildhoodRelig response "agree" on the basis of my response variable, SubstanceAbuseTotal after controlling for Sex.
- The remaining responses to the ChildhoodRelig variable are not significant.
- Sex is shown to not moderate the relationship between ChildhoodRelig and SubstanceAbuseTotal.
- On average, one who answered "no scriptures" is expected to have a substance abuse score that is 0.46 points higher than those who answered "agree," holding all other variables fixed.

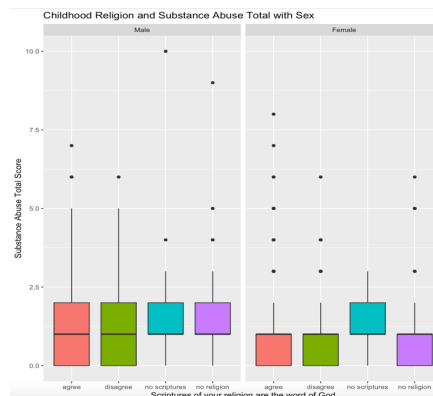


Figure 2: Childhood Religion and Substance Abuse Total by Sex

Discussion

- The "no scriptures" response to childhood religiosity is significantly related to higher adult substance abuse levels.
- These findings are important as they give indications for the affect of childhood religion on later substance use and abuse and could affect the way parents implicate religion into their children's lives.
- It is notable that Sex does not moderate this relationship.
- Future research is needed to analyze additional variables both in the specificities of religion and substance abuse and in separate categories such as education, occupation, and class.

References

- Loewenthal, K. M. (2014). Addiction: Alcohol and Substance Abuse in Judaism. Religions (Basel, Switzerland), 5(4), 972–984. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel5040972>
- Luczak, S. E., Prescott, C. A., Dalais, C., Raine, A., Venables, P. H., & Mednick, S. A. (2014). Religious factors associated with alcohol involvement: Results from the Mauritius Joint Child Health Project. Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 135, 37–44. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2013.10.028>
- Pardini, D. A., Plante, T. G., Sherman, A., & Stump, J. E. (2000). Religious faith and spirituality in substance abuse recovery: Determining the mental health benefits. Journal of Substance Abuse Treatment, 19(4), 347–354. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-5472\(00\)00125-2](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0740-5472(00)00125-2)
- Ransome, Y., Haeny, A. M., McDowell, Y. E., & Jordan, A. (2019). Religious involvement and racial disparities in opioid use disorder between 2004–2005 and 2012–2013: Results from the National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions. Drug and Alcohol Dependence, 205, 107615–107615. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugalcdep.2019.107615>
- LeTendre, M. L., & Reed, M. B. (2017). The Effect of Adverse Childhood Experience on Clinical Diagnosis of a Substance Use Disorder: Results of a Nationally Representative Study. Substance Use & Misuse, 52(6), 689–697. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10826084.2016.1253746>