

Impact of religion on mental health of Caribbean adolescents

El impacto de la religión en la salud mental de los adolescentes Caribeños

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Dear Editor:

Religion is the belief in an ever-living God, that is, in a Divine Mind and Will ruling the Universe and holding moral relations with mankind ^[1]. Spirituality is defined as the presence of a relationship with God that affects the individual's self-worth, sense of meaning, and connectedness with others. Religion is more comprehensive than spirituality, while spirituality is a part of religion ^[2]. Health has five dimensions of physical, mental, social, spiritual and religious health. These are often intertwined, very close and deep relationships. Religion, the basic manifesto of life, affects both mental health and other dimensions of health ^[3]. Herein, we discuss impact of religion on mental health of Caribbean adolescents to attract attention to the importance of religion on adolescent health.

Mental health is a state of spiritual well-being that enables people to cope with the stresses of life, realize their talents, learn and work well, and contribute to the society in which they live. Religion is the key factor supporting mental health in many societies around the world ^{[4][5]}; however, sparse studies have been performed on impact of religion on the mental health of Caribbean adolescents. Religion and faith are cultural cornerstones for many Caribbean communities, with organized religion often serving as a point of social connection and a way to foster resilience in the face of adversities. Furthermore, organized religion and personal spirituality and practice may improve mental health outcomes by helping youth cope with stressful situations and facilitating the formation of strong community-based social networks. When mental health services are inaccessible because of financial constraints, accessibility issues, or religious discrimination, religion may also instill hope and serve as a proxy for culturally safe care ^[6].

Olanlesi-Aliu *et al.* ^[6] found spiritual support, resilience, collective culture, and culturally congruent support as facilitators of positive mental health of Caribbean people in Canada. Another study identifies religiosity and spirituality as useful resources for Afro-Caribbean Canadian youth to maintain good mental health and well-being as a result of the environmental stressors they face. Religious and spiritual support is not only culturally appropriate but also faith-based as they aid Afro-Caribbean Canadian youth in finding meaning and in coping in difficult times ^[7]. Fante-Coleman *et al.* ^[5] have emphasized that religion plays a pivotal role in mental health of Caribbean adolescents.

Indeed, youth listens to emotions rather than reason. Emotions and passions are blind and do not see the outcome. Since the feelings of a person who does not see the outcome and prefers a pinch of present pleasure to tons of pleasures in the future prevail over reason and thought, the only way to save those who are fond of pleasure and entertainment from dissoluteness is to show the pain in the same pleasure and defeat their feelings ^[8]. The book, "A Guide for Youth" defeats the feelings of the youth by showing them the torments in the grave and hell that will result from forbidden pleasures, as well as the material and spiritual pains that come

with these pleasures right after ^[9]. There are thousands of Turkish young people who say that they have been saved from the whirlpools of dissoluteness and misguidance and have become useful to the country and the nation thanks to the lessons of the “A Guide for Youth ^[10].”

In conclusion, limited studies showed that religion played a pivotal role in mental health of Caribbean adolescents. We suggest that comprehensive studies should be performed about the impact of religion and spirituality on mental health of Caribbean adolescents.

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