

Wallace, J. M., Jr., Delva, J., O'Malley, P. M., Bachman, J. G., Schulenberg, J. E., Johnston, L. D., et al. (2008). Race/ethnicity, religiosity and adolescent alcohol, cigarette and marijuana use. *Social Work in Public Health, 23*(2&3), 193–213.

Abstract

Previous research suggests that religiosity “protects” young people from substances abuse. Because most of this research has been based on samples of White youth, however, the extent to which its findings apply to Black and Hispanic youth is largely unknown. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to address two relatively simple but essential questions: first, “How religious are American Black and Hispanic adolescents?” and second, “Does religiosity ‘protect’ Black and Hispanic young people from drug use as research suggests that it protects White youth?” The present study analyzed data from large, nationally representative samples of Black, Hispanic, and White 10th graders drawn from the Monitoring the Future Project. The results indicate that the majority of 10th graders, irrespective of racial or ethnic group, are at least somewhat religious and that a third or more might be considered very religious. The data further suggest that Black 10th graders are significantly more religious than White and Hispanic 10th graders. The data suggest that religion does, in fact, “protect” Black and Hispanic youth from substance abuse, but that the strength of this relationship is greater for White than for non-White youth. The reasons for racial and ethnic differences in the strength of the relationship between religiosity and substance abuse are not clear. One possibility is that religiosity may be more of a cultural or group phenomenon among non-White youth, while among White youth it may be more of an individual factor affecting individual behavior such as substance use. Understanding the mechanisms by which religion might influence substance use and the reasons why these mechanisms may vary by race and ethnicity is an important task for future research.