

Wallace, J. M., Jr., Brown, T. N., Bachman J. G., & LaVeist, T. A. (2003). The influence of race and religion on abstinence from alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana among adolescents. *Journal of Studies on Alcohol*, 64, 843-848.

Abstract

Objective. Past research has not fully explained why black youth are less likely than white youth to use alcohol and other substances. One plausible yet underexamined explanation is the “religion hypothesis,” which posits that black youth are more likely than white youth to abstain because they are more religious than white youth. The present study tested this hypothesis empirically.

Method. The study examined data from large, nationally representative samples of white and black 10th graders from the Monitoring the Future project.

Results. Relative to white students, black students are more likely to abstain from alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana and are more highly religious. Consistent with the “religiosity hypothesis,” race differences in abstinence are substantially reduced when race differences in religiosity are controlled. Unexpectedly, however, highly religious white youth are *more* likely than highly religious black youth to abstain from alcohol and marijuana use.

Conclusions. Although religion is an important protective factor against alcohol and other substance use for both white and black adolescents, it appears to impact white youth at an individual level, whereas for black youth the influence of religion seems greatest at the group level. Future research should seek to better understand the mechanisms through which religion promotes adolescents’ abstinence from the use of drugs and should seek to explain why the magnitude of its effect varies for black and white adolescents.