

Faith makes for a good night's sleep, study says

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WASHINGTON (RNS)—A strong faith could be the key to a good night's sleep, according to a study in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*.

Researchers found that those who believe in salvation and feel they have an unshakable relationship with God tend to sleep longer, fall asleep faster and feel more rested in the morning, according to Terrence D. Hill, associate professor at the University of Arizona School of Sociology.

Hill, a co-author of the study, "Sleep Quality and the Stress-Buffering Role of Religious Involvement: A Mediated Moderation Analysis," said the findings aren't surprising to him.

"If you believe a higher power is out there looking out for you, then what you're going through now is temporary," he said. "These worldly experiences are temporary."

Less stress

Those beliefs, he explained, help one feel less stress by giving a sense of hope and reducing sadness, and therefore sleeping better.

"It makes intuitive sense," said co-author Reed T. DeAngelis, graduate student of sociology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. "People who believe they're secure to God and will go to heaven when they die rest assured."

The lead author on the study is Christopher G. Ellison, professor of

sociology at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Their research, Hill explained, “also shows that religion can indirectly promote sleep by protecting against other risk factors—in this case, stress.”

According to the National Sleep Foundation, people tend to be too stressed to sleep when they can’t turn off their minds, and instead replay their worries or frustration; when they experience muscle tension; and when they have an increased heart rate, which also causes physical tension.

Shared sense of purpose

Religion can help with these stresses by bringing people together who share common beliefs on a regular basis, which builds solidarity and a shared sense of purpose. Church members also tend to provide assistance to one another and promote positive coping practices, according to the new study.

“For all these reasons, it is plausible that regular churchgoers may experience less agitation in the wake of negative life events, and, ultimately, better quality sleep,” the report reads.

The study also found, however, that one doesn’t necessarily need a religious community to reduce stress. A nonorganizational religious practice, such as frequent reading of Scripture and prayer, also can reduce stress and facilitate sound sleep so long as the individual feels secure in the attachment to God and the person’s place in the afterlife.

“Believers may be unable to comprehend why misfortune has befallen them, but they may nevertheless sleep better at night knowing that the universe is under the watchful eye of a deity who, at the end of the day, remains deeply concerned with the well-being of the world and its inhabitants,” the study concludes.

Generally unexplored area of research

Until now, the authors of the study say, there has been very little research on the correlation between religiosity and sleep.

In a paper they published last year in the *Journal of the National Sleep Foundation*, they wrote that over the past three decades numerous studies have shown religious involvement is associated with improved health, including healthy behaviors, mental health, biological functioning, physical health and lower mortality risk.

“In contrast to these bodies of work, researchers have virtually ignored possible links between religious involvement and sleep,” they wrote.

Cross-sectional data for the study came from a 2017 Baylor Religion Survey of 1,410 people who were asked about recent stressful events, sleep quality and religious involvement and religious cognitions.