Fact Sheet

Religious faith is important to many U.S. Veterans (more than two-thirds in some studies)

Research on religious faith and mental health indicates that those who are more religious experience less depression and anxiety, more positive emotions (psychological well-being, life satisfaction, happiness), and better mental health more generally.

Primary predictors of completed suicide are depression, loss of hope, loss of meaning and purpose in life, alcohol and drug use/abuse, and loss of social connections. Every one of those are less common among those who are more religious, explaining why religious involvement is associated with fewer suicidal thoughts, attempts, and completions in the overwhelming majority of studies that have looked at this, including studies in Veterans.

“Moral Injury,” a condition resulting from transgressing moral/ethical values, is common among Veterans who experience symptoms of PTSD. Of particular importance is that this syndrome may block successful treatment of PTSD and has been associated with higher rates of depression, anxiety, and suicide. Veterans who are more religious are less likely to experience moral injury, and spiritual interventions to treat moral injury in Veterans have been developed.

Better mental health among Veterans who are religious likely translates into better physical health, including less heart disease, lower blood pressure, less stroke, slower cognitive decline with aging, less physical disability with aging, better immune function and less systemic inflammation, better endocrine functions (lower levels of stress hormones), lower death rates from cancer and cardiovascular disease, and greater longevity in general.

Sources of Information

- Protestant Christianity and Mental Health: Beliefs, Research, and Applications. Amazon: CreateSpace Platform, 2017.
- Buddhism and Mental Health: Beliefs, Research, and Applications. Amazon: CreateSpace Platform, 2017.