

Does God answer prayer? ASU research says 'yes'

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Does God or some other type of transcendent entity answer prayer? The answer, according to a new Arizona State University study published in the March journal *Research on Social Work Practice*, is "yes."

David R. Hodge, an assistant professor of social work in the College of Human Services at Arizona State University, conducted a comprehensive analysis of 17 major studies on the effects of intercessory prayer – or prayer that is offered for the benefit of another person – among people with psychological or medical problems. He found a positive effect.

“There have been a number of studies on intercessory prayer, or prayer offered for the benefit of another person,” said Hodge, a leading expert on spirituality and religion. “Some have found positive results for prayer. Others have found no effect. Conducting a meta-analysis takes into account the entire body of empirical research on intercessory prayer. Using this procedure, we find that prayer offered on behalf of another yields positive results.”

Hodge’s work is featured in the March, 2007, issue of *Research on Social Work Practice*, a disciplinary journal devoted to the publication of empirical research on practice outcomes. It is widely recognized as one of the most prestigious journals in the field of social work.

Hodge noted that his study is important because it is a compilation of available studies and is not a single work with a single conclusion. His “Systematic Review” takes into account the findings of 17 studies that

used intercessory prayer as a treatment in practice settings.

“Some people feel Benson and associates’ study from last year, which is the most recent and showed no positive effects for intercessory prayer, is the final word,” said Hodge, referring to a 2006 article by Dr. Herbert Benson of the Harvard Medical School that measured the therapeutic effect of intercessory prayer in cardiac bypass patients. “But, this research suggests otherwise. This study enables us to look at the big picture. When the effects of prayer are averaged across all 17 studies, controlling for differences in sample sizes, a net positive effect for the prayer group is produced.

“This is the most thorough and all-inclusive study of its kind on this controversial subject that I am aware of,” said Hodge. “It suggests that more research on the topic may be warranted, and that praying for people with psychological or medical problems may help them recover.”

The use of prayer as a therapeutic intervention is controversial. Yet, Hodge notes that survey research indicates that many people use intercessory prayer as an intervention to aid healing, which raises questions about its effectiveness as an intervention strategy.

“Overall, the meta-analysis indicates that prayer is effective. Is it effective enough to meet the standards of the American Psychological Association’s Division 12 for empirically validated interventions? No. Thus, we should not be treating clients suffering with depression, for example, only with prayer. To treat depression, standard treatments, such as cognitive therapy, should be used as the primary method of treatment.”

In addition to his inclusion in the upcoming issue of Research on Social Work Practice, Hodge is widely published and has appeared on the pages of Social Work, Social Work Research, Journal of Social Service

Research, Journal of Marital and Family Therapy, and Families in Society. He has also authored the book “Spiritual assessment: A handbook for helping professionals.”

Source: Arizona State University

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