

Destroying God's temple? Physical Inactivity, Poor Diet, Obesity, and other "Sin" Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Individual differences in health behavior across religious and spiritual individuals might be attributed to the general belief that the body is God's temple, and should be treated with care and respect. Also, it is possible that some behaviors are thought to destroy the body (God's temple), while inactivity, poor diet, and obesity might not be viewed in this way. Thus, our first aim was to assess current beliefs and attitudes regarding the role of physical inactivity, poor diet, and obesity in the destruction of the body, God's temple. Subsequently, our second aim was to determine if these beliefs and attitudes were correlated with actual, self-reported physical activity, dietary intake, and body mass index (BMI). An online survey assessing the aforementioned variables was administered to 112 adults (≥ 18 years of age) who considered themselves Christians, and had a mean BMI of 26.36 ± 6.29 kg/m². Participants self-reported their religion with the majority selecting Baptist (29%), other (22%), or Non-Denominational (21%). On average, participants had a moderate-high belief that their body was God's temple (i.e. manifestation of God in the body; $M = 64.84$ out of possible score of 84). Mean beliefs that obesity, physically inactive lifestyle, poor diet, and overeating destroy the body, God's temple were similar to those beliefs regarding drug use, smoking, and excessive drinking, but higher than pre-marital sex, tattoos, body piercings, and lust. When these beliefs were correlated with the manifestation of God in the body, only premarital sex ($r = .68$), lust ($r = .62$), tattoos ($r = .42$), body piercings ($r = .38$), drug use ($r = .26$), and smoking ($r = .19$) were found to be significant ($p \leq .05$). Self-perceived manifestation of God in the body was significantly positively correlated ($p < .01$) with prayer frequency ($r = .65$), church attendance ($r = .67$), and spirituality ($r = .76$). Spirituality was positively correlated ($p < .01$) with prayer frequency ($r = .77$) and church attendance ($r = .66$). However, manifestation of God in the body was not correlated with physical activity, dietary intake, or BMI. In conclusion, our participants were definitive in their belief that physically inactive lifestyles, unhealthy eating, overeating, and being obese destroy the body, God's temple. However, destroying the body with physical inactivity or poor diet was not necessarily viewed as sinful, on average, with variation in this view. Additionally, these beliefs did not correlate to self-reported physical activity, dietary behavior, and body weight (i.e. BMI). Also, the view that one's body is God's temple (i.e. manifestation of God in the body) did not correlate to beliefs that physical inactivity, poor diet and obesity destroy the body, but did relate to beliefs that premarital sex, lust, tattoos, body piercings, drug use, and smoking destroy the body. It is possible, then, that physical inactivity, poor dietary habits, and obesity are not internalized into the spiritual perspective as destroying the body, God's temple, in the same way as other "sin" behaviors. Such findings provide a foundation for future research to expand our understanding of the confluence of health and spiritual lifestyles.