



# Engagement in religious activity compared to peer support: An intervention for suicidal ideation among high school students

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## ABSTRACT

Suicidal ideation (SI) can lead to suicide. Suicide is the second leading cause of death among children ages 10-14 and the third leading cause of death among adolescents ages 15-24 (CDC). This study compares active engagement in religious activities versus peer support as an effective resource in decreasing SI among high school students in the United States. The research explains how active engagement in religious activities will produce better results than peer support alone for decreasing SI in the targeted population. Semi-structured interviews of high school students and self-report questionnaires are utilized in this study. Our research hopes to support clinicians in better understanding clients' experiences of suicidal ideation and implement clients' natural resource of active engagement in religious activities as an addition in the treatment plan.

Key words: Adolescence, Religion, Suicidal Ideation, Peer Support

## INTRODUCTION

- There has been an 50% increase in suicide death rates among youth (10-19) in the past 20 years. Suicidal Ideation is a concern for high school students in the United States, with a 44% increase in plans for suicide in high school students since 2019. (Brewer, Doss, Sheenhan, Davis & Feinglass, 2022).
- Peer support has shown to be effective for general mental health but does not help with suicidality because peers cannot manage each other's depression (Matlin, Molock & Tebes, 2011).
- While peer support has shown to decrease SI, it has not been as significant as the protective factor of engagement in religious activities (e.g., church attendance and religious traditions).
- Survivors of previous suicidal attempts caused by suicidal ideation have reflected on how engaging in prayer and church attendance have given them a sense of hope, strength, and brought them meaning making which led to a decrease in suicidal ideation (Brito, et al., 2021).
- Therefore, our research hopes to support clinicians in better understanding clients' experiences of suicidal ideation and implement clients' natural resource of active engagement in religious activities as an addition in the treatment plan.

## PRIMARY AIM AND HYPOTHESES

### Research Question:

Is active engagement in religious activities more effective in decreasing suicidal ideation than peer support alone for high school students in the United States?

### Hypothesis:

Active engagement in religious activities will produce better results than peer support alone for decreasing suicidal ideation in high school students in the United States.

## METHODS

### Participants

- High school students (ages 14-18) from 5 public schools throughout the United States.
- Ranging from 200-400 students from each high school, for a total sample size of 2000 participants.
- Participants will be invited via online survey in core competency class.

### Procedures

- Participants will be sent an online survey assessing social support, suicidal ideation and religiosity scales using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT)
- Survey results analyzed with SPSS (IBM SPSS, Armonk, NY)

## MEASURES

### Measures

*Religiosity and Spirituality Scale for Youth*, is a self report, 37 item, 4-item Likert scale (Never, Sometimes, Mostly, Always). This assessment is inclusive of religion and measures prayer and religious attendance in youth. A higher score shows increased engagement in religiosity and spirituality.

*Beck Suicidal Intent Scale*, is a self-report, 20 item, 3-item Likert scale (The total score is calculated by adding items 1-15. If an item is "Not applicable" it must be coded -8.-8's are not to be added when calculating the total score). This assessment measures suicide intent, originally created to measure suicide intent associated with previous attempt. A higher score shows higher suicidal intent.

*McGill Friendship Questionnaire*, is a self-report, 30 item, 9-item Likert Scale (Never, Rarely, Once in a While, Fairly Often, Always). This assessment measures perceived social support in youth. A higher score shows increased perception of social support.

## RESULTS

### Hypothesis

Active engagement in religious activities will produce better results than peer support alone for decreasing suicidal ideation in high school students in the United States.

### Statistical test

In this study we will use a t-test regression to test the group differences between active engagement in religious activities and peer support on suicidal ideation in high school students to analyze the data.

## Discussion

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#### Social implications

This study explores the relationship of active engagement in religious activities compared to peer support to reduce suicidal ideation among high school students in the United States. Our research looks to explain the impact of active engagement in religious activities as decreasing suicidal ideation among high students in the United States whereas peer support alone is less effective.

#### Clinical implications

Many clinicians are working with high students in the United States who are impacted by suicidal ideation. Our research hopes to support clinicians in better understanding clients' experiences of suicidal ideation and implement clients' natural resource of active engagement in religious activities as an addition in the treatment plan.

#### Future research implications

- The results of this study determines a limited use for peer support alone in reducing suicidal ideation in high school students which suggests a focus on active engagement in religious activities will be more constructive for future research.
- Does prayer at home have the same effect on the reduction of suicidal ideation as active engagement in religious activities?
  - Is active engagement in religious activities more effective in decreasing suicidal ideation than peer support alone for college students in the United States?