



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 17, 2023

Report: To Stay Healthy and Live Longer, Go to Church

[A new study](#) released by the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) shows that people who attend church regularly — who “participate in organized religious activities” — live longer.

The study follows one done by the National Academy of Science last year. At that moment in time, the National Center for Health Statistics, part of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), reported that life expectancy in the United States had dropped nearly three full years just since 2020. This “was the biggest two-decline in life expectancy since 1921-1923.”



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In other words, instead of continuing to decline (life expectancy in 1900 was 46 years), mortality leveled off around 1990 and then began to climb.

Theorists, scientists, and actuaries call the upward bending mortality curve a result of “despair,” or “deaths of despair.” And the National Academy of Science study failed to uncover the reason why:

Every symptom of despair has been defined as a disorder or dysregulation within the individual.

This incorrectly frames the problem, forcing individuals to grapple on their own — by learning resilience, self-help, and so on.

It also emphasizes treatment by pharmacology, providing innumerable drugs for anxiety, depression, anger, psychosis, and obesity, plus new drugs to treat addictions to the old drugs. We cannot defeat despair solely with pills — to the contrary, pills will only deepen it.

But the study released by the NBER — “Opiates of the Masses? Deaths of Despair and the Decline of American Religion” — show that “the initial rise in deaths of despair [drug overdose, suicide, alcoholism] in the US were preceded by a large decline in organized religious participation.”

It added,

We know of no other cultural phenomenon involving such large, widespread changes in participation prior to the initial rise in US mortality, nor do we know of any other phenomenon that matches the seemingly idiosyncratic patterns observed for mortality.

The study further reveals that those living in states in which people attend church on a regular basis — “participating” in religious services, or “religiosity” — live longer, while those living in more secular states tend to die sooner:

We also show that religiosity and the rate of deaths of despair are negatively correlated



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across states: states with high levels of religiosity have suffered less from mortality due to alcohol, suicides, or drug poisonings....

States that experienced large decreases in religiosity have had the largest gains in the rate of deaths of despair.

The authors state that it's actual participation — regular church attendance — rather than religious beliefs that matter:

The impact that we witness seems to be driven by the decline in formal religious participation rather than in belief or personal activities like prayer.

These results underscore the importance of cultural institutions such as religious establishments in promoting well-being.

The results are counter to the widely promoted belief that capitalism's "failure" — i.e., income inequality, social isolation, stagnant wages, runaway inflation, rising unemployment, etc., etc. — is the root cause of the 150,000 deaths of despair that occur every year.

Perhaps the study could be turned into a marketing campaign by churches suffering declining attendance: "Come to church, get saved, live longer!"



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