

## The power of prayer: Believing in God can help treat depression

- **New research has found that people who believe in a higher power respond better to psychiatric treatment**
- **Benefit is not confined to a specific religion**

By Rachel Reilly

A strong faith in a higher power has been shown to improve mental health

Belief in God may improve treatment for those suffering with depression, says a new study.

Faith in a higher being has been found to significantly improve treatment for people suffering with a psychiatric illness, according to research carried out by McLean Hospital in Belmont, Massachusetts. Researchers followed 159 patients over the course of a year at the Behavioral Health Partial Hospital program at McLean to investigate the relationship between a patient's level of belief in God, expectations for treatment and actual treatment outcomes.

Each participant was asked to gauge their belief in God as well as their expectations for treatment outcome on a five-point scale.

Levels of depression, wellbeing, and self-harm were assessed at the beginning and end of their treatment program. Researchers found that patients with 'no' or only 'slight' belief in God were twice as likely not to respond to treatment than patients with higher levels of belief.

And more than 30 per cent of patients claiming no specific religious affiliation still saw the same benefits in treatment if their belief in God was rated as moderately or very high.

Researchers concluded that a belief in God is associated with improved treatment outcomes in psychiatric care.

The study, published in the Journal of Affective Disorders, said : 'Our work suggests that people with a moderate to high level of belief in a higher power do significantly better in short-term psychiatric treatment than those without, regardless of their religious affiliation.

Belief was associated with not only improved psychological wellbeing, but a decrease in depression and intention to self-harm, explained David Rosmarin, McLean Hospital clinician and instructor in the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical.

He added: 'I hope that this work will lead to larger studies and increased funding in order to help as many people as possible.'

Previous studies have highlighted the power of prayer on a person's health.



Alone: Psychiatric disorders can be very isolating for the sufferer but a belief in God can help, say researchers

Research at San Francisco General Hospital monitored the effects of prayer on 393 cardiac patients. Patients were asked if they wanted to take part in the trial but were not told whether they would be the subject of prayers.

Half were prayed for by a group of strangers who only had the patients' names. Those who were prayed for had fewer complications, fewer cases of pneumonia and needed less drug treatment. They also improved more quickly and were able to leave hospital earlier. A separate study, at Columbia University in New York, asked people in Australia, the U.S. and Canada to pray for named people undergoing IVF treatment in Korea.

Of the group in Korea, half had prayers said about them by the foreign strangers.

Among this half, the success rate for implantation of the embryo in the womb went up from 8 per cent to 16 per cent. Cases of successful conception - where the foetus started developing - went up from 25 to 50 per cent.