

Dimensions of Social Support as Mediators of the Association between Religiousness and Aggression

Sarah K. Hill, B. S.,¹ Courtney E. Lilly, B. S.,¹ Ken G. Brewer, M. A.,² & Jon R. Webb, Ph. D.¹

¹ East Tennessee State University, Department of Psychology, Johnson City, Tennessee

² Kaplan University



INTRODUCTION

A relationship has been established between religiousness and both aggression (Storch & Storch, 2002; Burns, 2004) and levels of social support (Ellison & George, 1994).

Social support levels have been found to mediate the relationships between religiousness and psychological adjustment (Salsman, Brown, Brechting, & Carlson, 2005), religiousness and suicidal behavior (Robins & Fiske, 2009), and religious involvement and mental health outcomes (Nooney & Woodrum, 2002).

It has also been discovered that amount of social support impacts levels of aggressiveness (Benhorin & McMahon, 2008; Kashani & Shepperd, 1990; Scarpa & Haden, 2006; Schat & Kelloway, 2003).

However, little research has been done examining the relationships among religiousness, social support, and aggression-related outcomes.

Purpose of the Study: To help improve the understanding of the relationship between religiousness, social support, and levels of aggression.

General Hypothesis: Social support will mediate the relationship between lifetime religiousness and aggression.

METHODS

Design & Participants:

- Cross-Sectional
- Undergraduate college students (n=481)
- ♀ = 75.3%; n = 362
- Caucasian = 92.1%; n = 418
- $M_{age} = 22.17$; $SD = 6.03$

Measures:

Demographic variables (i.e., gender, age, education, ethnicity, marital status)

Religious Background and Behaviors Questionnaire (Connors, Tonigan, & Miller, 1996)

Positive Social Support (Abbey, Abramis, & Caplan, 1985)

Social Undermining (Abbey, Abramis, & Caplan, 1985)

Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992)

Analysis:

Multiple mediation (Preacher & Hayes, 2008)

- Adjusted for demographic variables

Table 1: Indirect Effect(s) of Social Support

	Lifetime Religiousness		
	Point Estimate	Lower CI	Upper CI
TOTAL	-.4121	-.8194	-.0644
a_1b_1	-.0138	-.1810	.1359
a_2b_2	-.3983	-.8094	-.0665
vs	.3844	.0432	.8844

CI = Bias Corrected and Accelerated 95% Confidence Interval
 TOTAL = Total Indirect Effect
 a_1b_1 = Specific Indirect Effect through Social Support
 a_2b_2 = Specific Indirect Effect through Social Undermining
 vs = a_1b_1 versus a_2b_2

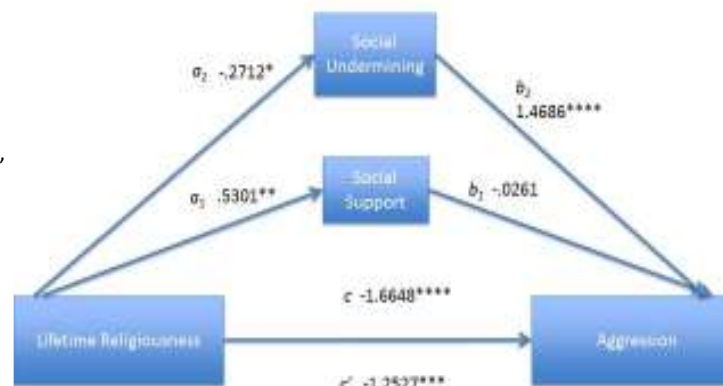


Figure 1: Effect of Lifetime Religiousness on Aggression as Mediated by Social Support
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$, **** $p < .0001$

RESULTS

The overall model was significant ($R^2 = .25****$).

Lifetime religiousness was shown to have a significant salutary effect on aggression both directly and indirectly (partial mediation) through social undermining, only. That is, positive social support did not play a role in the relationship between lifetime religiousness and aggression.

More specifically, in addition to a direct association, higher levels of lifetime religiousness were *also* associated with less perceived social undermining, which in turn was associated with less aggression.

DISCUSSION

Of the two dimensions of social support measured, only social undermining was shown to partially mediate the relationship between lifetime religiousness and aggression.

Consistent with prior theory (Landau, Bjorkqvist, Lagerspetz, Osterman, & Gideon, 2002), our findings provide support for the ameliorative impact of lifetime religiousness on aggression, including physical and verbal actions, as well as anger and hostility.

Within this setting of rural northeast Tennessee, there is a strong cultural tradition of religiousness. It may be that adherence to faith-based religious principles inherently leads to less perception of social undermining, which in turn results in lower levels of aggression, indicating that religion may serve as a kind of impulse control system. Likewise, It may be that lifetime religiousness helps individuals reframe potentially problematic interpersonal interactions in a more favorable light thereby preventing aggressive responses.

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