

# REFUGEES AND RELIGION: THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOUS COPING ON EMOTIONAL DISTRESS AND RESILIENCY



Kirra Crump, kirra98@gmail.com | Stacey Shaw, PhD | Mallory Funk, MSW | Brigham Young University | School of Social Work

## INTRODUCTION:

- Religion may have positive and negative benefits on mitigating stress of displacement in refugees. It can serve as a positive coping mechanism when used to reframe the situation and find meaning and hope.
- Religion can also serve as a negative coping mechanism that can lead to feeling abandoned by God and viewing trauma as a punishment from God.
- This research studied the effects of religious coping on the emotional distress and resiliency of refugees resettled in the U. S.

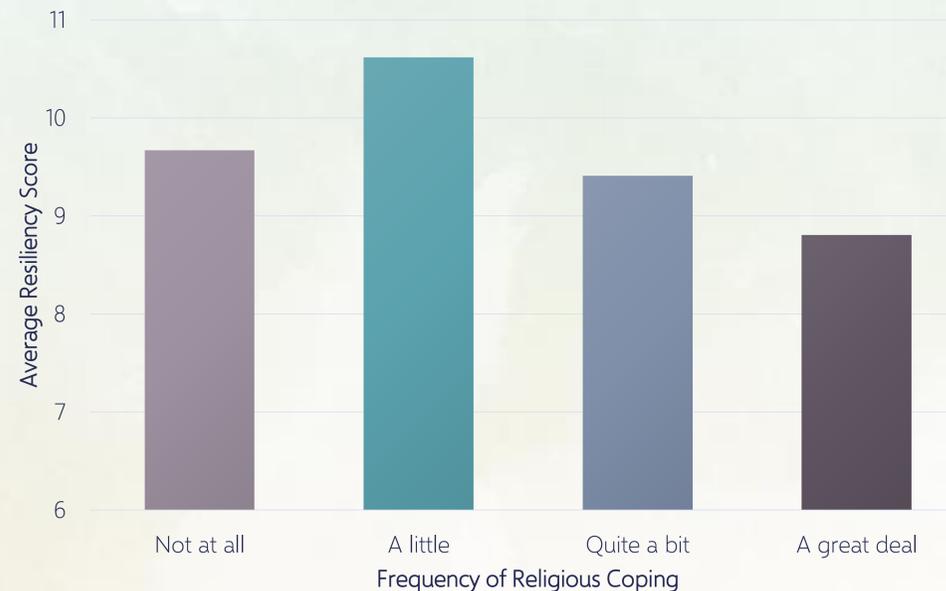
## METHODS:

- Participants were recruited through three International Rescue Committee (IRC) in Denver, CO, Oakland, CA, and Salt Lake City, UT.
- All participants were immigrants with refugee status, 18 years or older and arrived in the U. S. in the last two years
- Participants were interviewed by IRC staff and asked a series of 78 demographic questions and psycho-social support questions

## ANALYSIS:

- Data was analyzed using bivariate chi squared analysis and linear regression.
- Religious coping (independent variable) was measured by asking participants, "To what extent is your religion involved in understanding or dealing with stressful situations in any way?"
- Emotional distress (dependent variable) was measured by the RHS-15. Resiliency (dependent variable) was measured by the Brief Resiliency Scale.
- The variables of gender, age, religious affiliation, and education level upon entering the U. S. were controlled for in the linear regression.

### Resiliency and Religious Coping



## RESULTS:

- Participants were mostly male with an average age of 36.7 and affiliated with Christianity or Catholicism
- 52% of participants who met the cutoff as positive for emotional distress used religion as a way to deal with stress "A great deal", compared to 17% of participants who did not meet the cutoff ( $p < .05$ ) (See Table 1)
- Linear regression revealed higher religious coping significantly predicted lower resiliency scores ( $p < .05$ )

Table 1

*Linear Regression Predicting Emotional Distress and Resiliency*

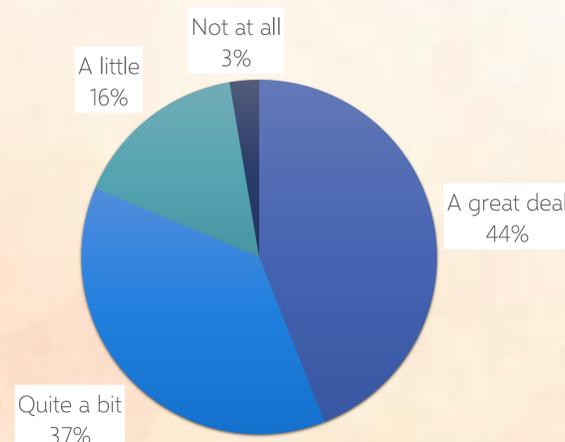
| Variable                              | Emotional Distress | Resiliency |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|
| Age                                   | .23*               | -.01       |
| Gender (Male = 0)                     | 5.0                | 1.4*       |
| Religious Coping                      | .76                | -.70*      |
| Education Upon Entering US            | 1.0                | .41        |
| Religion (Not Muslim = 0, Muslim = 1) | .26                | .01†       |
| R <sup>2</sup>                        | .02                | .07        |

†  $p < .10$ ; \* $p < .05$

## IMPLICATIONS:

- Results suggest that when refugees use religion to cope with stressful events more frequently, they tend to have more emotional distress and be less resilient.
- Individuals who use religious coping more frequently may have dealt with more stressful life situations, leading them to have higher emotional distress and lower resiliency.
- Religion, which is largely assumed to be a beneficial coping mechanism, may not be this black and white. Clinicians should take an objective stance on the role of religious coping and broaden their perspectives on what role religious coping plays for their clients.

### Frequency of Religious Coping



### Emotional Distress and Religious Coping

