

COVID'S MENTAL HEALTH EFFECTS VARY WIDELY

Covid-19's effects on our physical health is clear cut: we are witnessing a surge in infections, hospitalizations and deaths. We are also witnessing a surge in mental health problems. Now we have the results of a new Gallup poll that offers rich demographic detail.

The segment of the public that is experiencing the most dramatic effects of Covid-19 are young single women who identify as liberals and are not religious. The segment that is suffering the least mental health problems are older married men who identify as conservatives and are church-goers. [Note: We are using the term liberal for what the poll names as Democrats, and conservative for what are identified as Republicans.]

All of this is consistent with what Bill Donohue found in his 2015 book, *The Catholic Advantage: Why Health, Happiness, and Heaven Await the Faithful*.

Of all the demographic categories—sex, party affiliation, religiosity, race, age, and income—there is only one subgroup that is actually reporting better mental health than a year ago: those who attend religious services on a weekly basis (they experienced a 4% increase—every other category and subgroup witnessed a decrease).

We have known for years that there is a positive correlation between those who score high on religiosity (beliefs and practices) and physical health; the more religious the person is, the healthier he is likely to be. The correlation is even higher when measures of mental health are weighed.

What causes this phenomenon? Beliefs are related to bonding, and bonding keeps us mentally fit. The obverse—secular-minded

people who are unattached and without strong family and friendship bonds—are the most at risk for loneliness, depression and suicide.

Young unmarried people do not enjoy, on average, the strong bonds that older married persons enjoy. Women are particularly given to problems when social bonds are weak. Liberals tend to be secularists and they lack the bonding that religious persons experience through prayer.

In his book, Donohue contrasted two very different segments of the population: cloistered nuns and Hollywood celebrities. The former were by far the healthiest, both in terms of physical and mental health. They bonded with each other, horizontally, and with God, vertically. Such a tight-knit lifestyle explains why they are also the happiest. By contrast, the self-absorbed milieu that Hollywood is noted for works against social bonding. Hence, the surfeit of mental problems that mark Tinseltown.

Here's the bottom line: The growing secularization of our society, combined with a less than friendly environment for people of faith to operate in, is a threat to our mental health.

Everyone knows we can't beat Mother Nature. What everyone does not know is that we can't beat nature's God, either. Going it alone is not in our best interest.