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The Relationship Between Adolescents' Participation in Religious/Spiritual Activities and Mental Health as an Adult

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Introduction

- Many receiving mental health treatment across the U.S. see spirituality and religion as very helpful in supporting their mental state (Oxhandler et al., 2021).
- How often black Americans attended church in adolescence is related to how as a young adult they could spiritually handle mentally stressing situations (Alexander, 2017).
- There's a gap in previous studies because most of them study specific groups rather than using a representative sample of the U.S. In addition, there is a lack of studies investigating the relationship between adolescent religiosity/spirituality and adult mental health.
- This study uses a representative sample and investigates the association between adolescent religiosity/spirituality and adult mental health.

Research Question

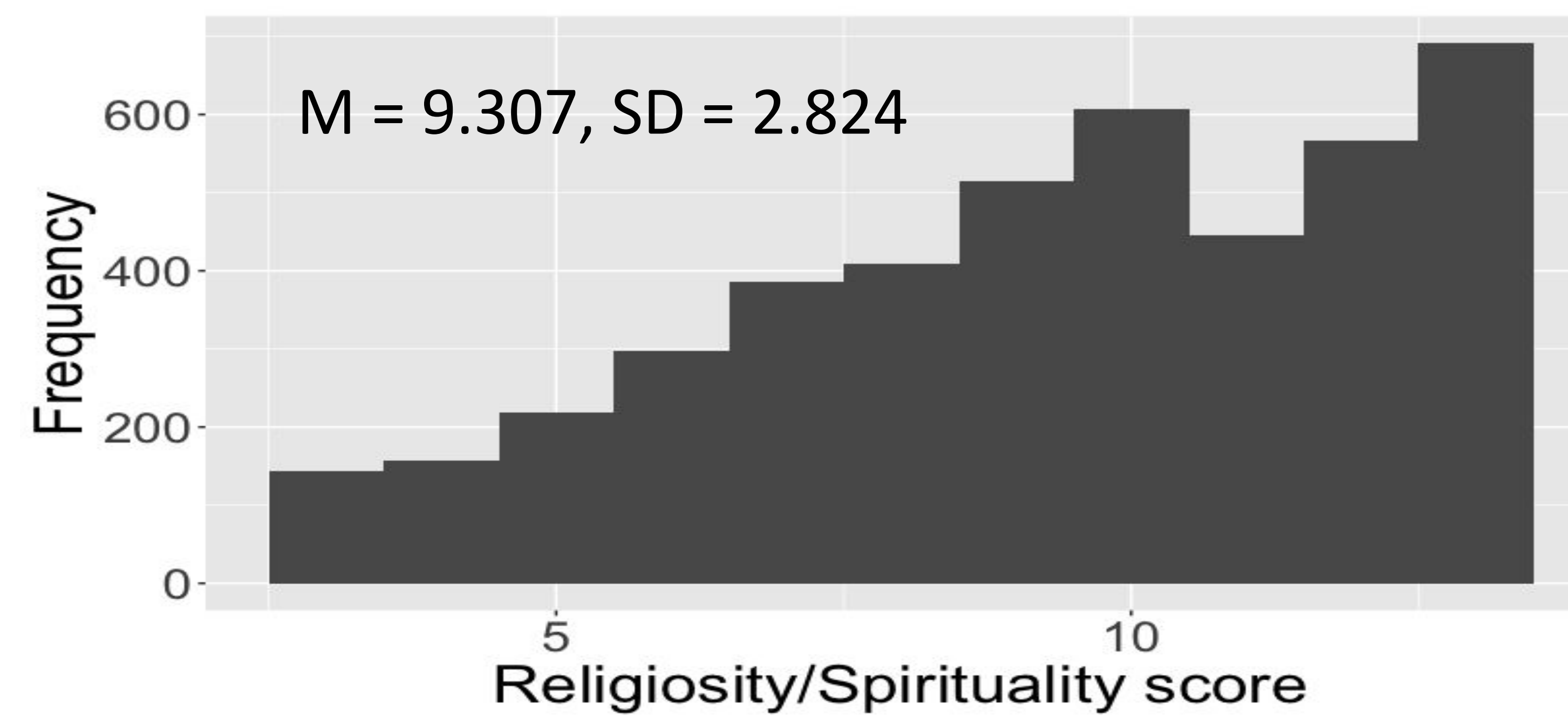
- 1) Is there a relationship between one's participation in religious/spiritual activities as an adolescent and one's adult mental health?
- 2) Does this relationship change depending on one's participation in religious/spiritual activities as an adult?

Methodology

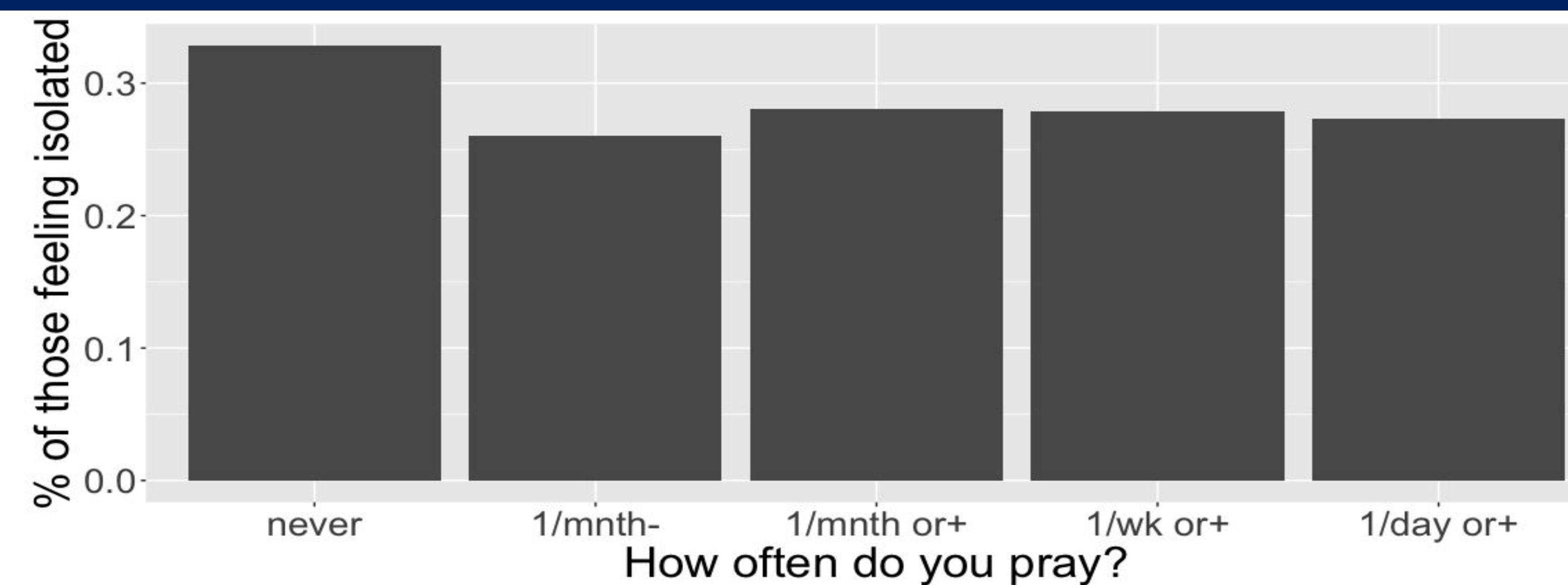
- Sample: Add Health Wave IV: 5,114 participants between 25 and 34; 63% White, 23% Black, 5% Multiracial, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% Indian or Native American, 5% Other.
- Information was collected from a group of adolescents (13 to 22), and these same adolescents as adults (25 to 34).
- Procedure: 45 minute questionnaire (adolescents); 90 minute computer assisted interview (adults)

Question	Response Options
How often do you pray?	1=never to 5=at least once a day
Adolescent Religiosity/spirituality scale: combined questions relating to attendance of religious services and prayer frequency	3=never religious/spiritual to 13=very religious/spiritual
How often have you attended religious services in the past yr?	1=never to 4=once a week or more
How often do you feel isolated from others?	0=never to 3=often
Depression scale: combined questions relating to loneliness, metaperceptions, unhappiness, and stress	4=no depressive symptoms to 17=severe depressive symptoms
Number of words recalled after 90 seconds	0=0 words to 15=15 words
Adult Religiosity/spirituality scale: combined questions relating to attendance of religious services and prayer frequency	0=never religious/spiritual to 17=very religious/spiritual

Adolescents' Religiosity/Spirituality Score



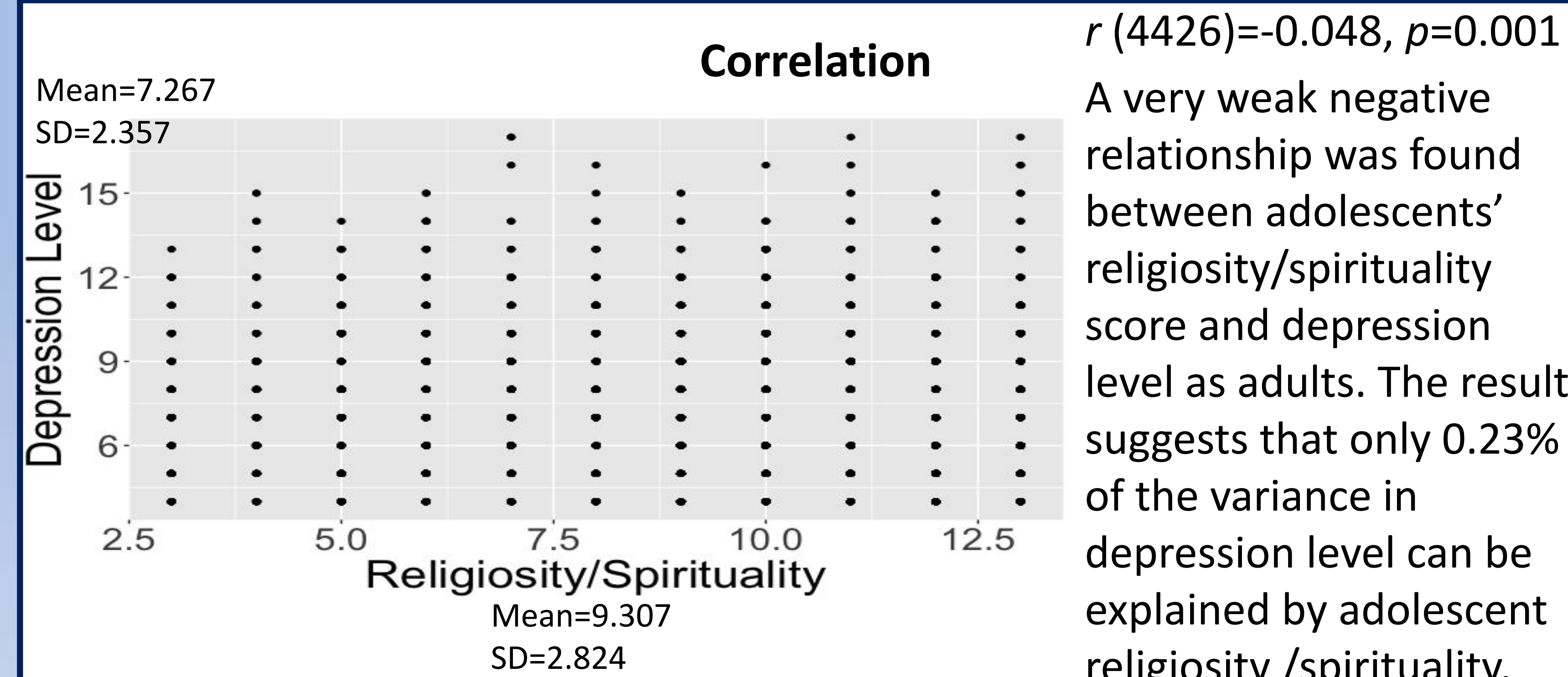
Is there a relationship between how often an adolescent prays and the frequency of isolating feelings as adults?



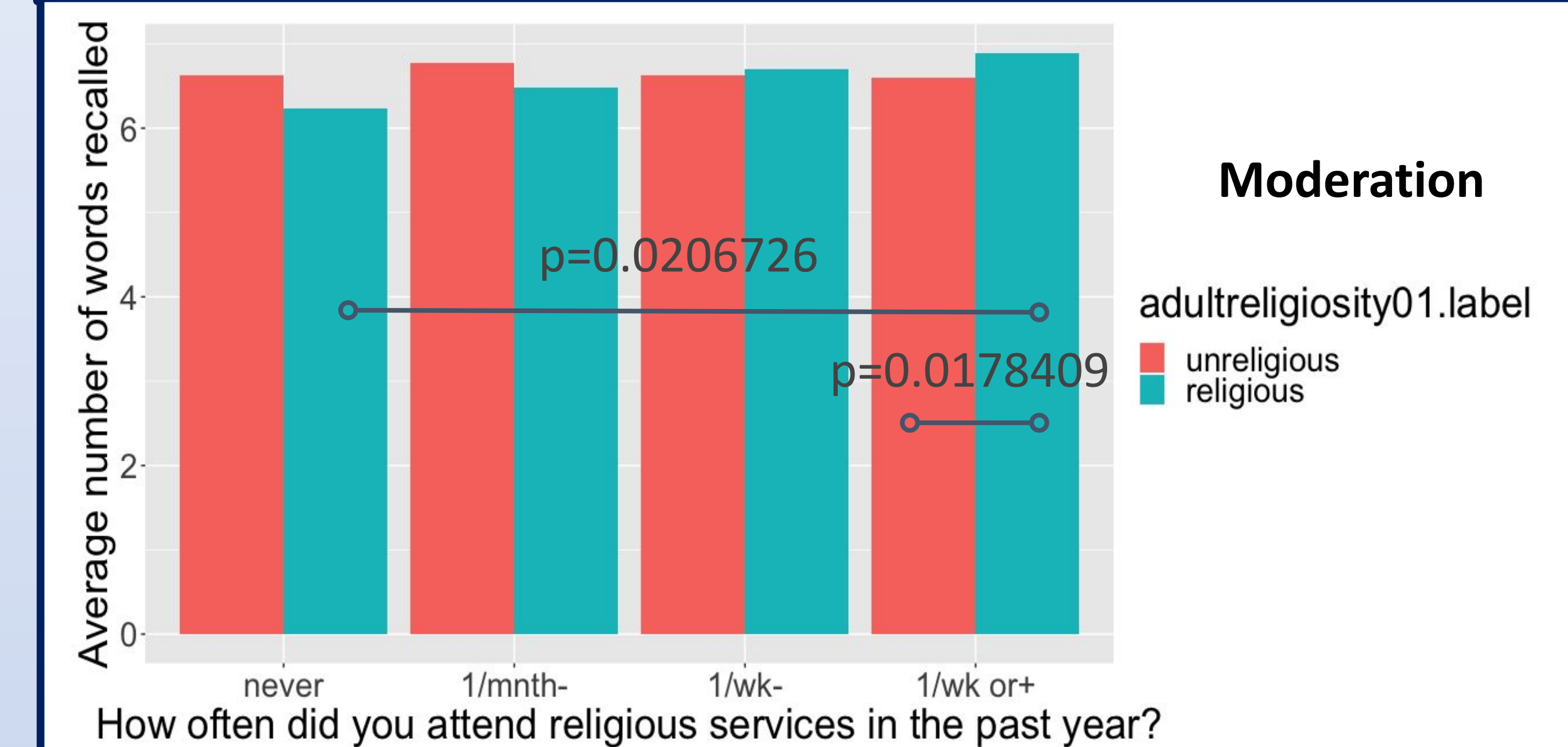
Chi Square - $X^2(4)=5.076, p=0.280$.

No relationship was found between how often adolescents pray and isolating feelings as adults. However, the group that felt isolated the most were the individuals that never prayed in adolescence.

Are adolescents' religiosity/spirituality related to depression level as adults?



Does the relationship between adolescent service attendance and adult short term memory differ based on religiosity/spirituality in adulthood?



-Religious Service Attendance (in adolescence): $F(3, 4410)=1.797, p=0.145$

-Religiosity/Spirituality (as an adult): $F(1, 4410)=2.017, p=0.1557$

-Significant Interaction: $F(3,4410)= 5.482, p<0.001$

There was a significant interaction between attendance and short term (SM) memory while considering adult religiosity/spirituality. On average, if attendance was very high in adolescence, SM memory is better in adulthood if one is religious/spiritual as an adult compared to a non-religious adult. In addition, SM memory is generally better in adulthood for religious adults with very high attendance than religious adults with no attendance.

Take Home Message

Weak evidence was found for an association between adolescents' participation in religious/spiritual activities and mental health in adulthood.

Discussion

- On average, religious adults that attended religious services very frequently in adolescence perform better on a 90 second memory test than some that might be deemed less religious.
- The more adolescents participate in religious/spiritual activities in adolescence, the (very slightly) less likely they'll experience depressive symptoms in adulthood (this practically agrees with the second study listed in the introduction).
- Future research should focus only on religious activities or only spiritual activities.

References

- Alexander, S. L. (2017). Examining the retention of African American young adults in their childhood church. *Walden Dissertations and Doctoral Studies*, 78(10-B(E)), 1-78.
- Oxhandler, H. K., Pargament, K. I., Pearce, M. J., Vieten, C., & Moffatt, K. M. (2021). The relevance of religion and spirituality to mental health: a national survey of current clients' views. *Social Work*, 66(3), 254-264. <https://doi-org.ezproxy.bethel.edu/10.1093/sw/swab025>