

Health Beliefs, Behavior and Perception of Spiritual Growth and Salvation: A Descriptive Analysis from a Global Church Member Survey

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Background – Theologians have long thought about the relationship between spirituality and health (Tillich, 1961). In Judaism and Islam, there are important dietary restrictions (Rosenblum, 2018; Kashim, 2015). While some today view Kosher or Halal as being for health (Health Benefits of a Kosher Diet, 2017), it is important to remember as Rosenblum notes, that the Torah and Quran focus on what God requires rather on why He requires it (2018).

The Seventh-day Adventist Church, since its founding, has integrated doctrinal beliefs with what is called the Health Message. Adventists believe that it is important to abstain from alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, unclean meats (Leviticus 11). In addition, the Church emphasizes a vegetarian diet. Adventists believe that these health practices are based on science (Orlich, 2015) and are important for spiritual growth. Adventists believe that physical, mental, and spiritual aspects of the human person are indivisible (Skrzypaszek, 2014).

Purpose Analyses -- The purpose of this analysis is to examine the extent of Seventh-day Adventist Church memberships' acceptance of core health message. The focus is on the relationship between church members' views and acceptance of various components of the Health Message and members' views on the contribution of the Health Message to spiritual growth and salvation and variance by social and regional groupings.

Methods -- The data used come from a survey of the global Seventh-day Adventist Church carried out in 2017-2018. The total number of respondents was over 63,000 (with at least 55,000 valid responses) and came from 13 world divisions of the world church. Research teams familiar with each world division of the Church used a purposive sample to ensure variance in church size, type of geographical location, and cultural groups, collected the data. Our research team was responsible for integrating and analyzing the global data. Our institutional IRB approved the study. Three conceptual areas were examined:

1. Respondent attitudes toward the Adventist Health Message
2. Respondent dietary and substance use patterns
3. Respondent beliefs about the spiritual meaning of the Health Message

Findings -- About 80% of the global sample wholeheartedly embraced the belief that Adventists should eat healthy diets, abstain from unclean meats, and avoid alcohol and drugs. Only 9% of the global respondents had used alcohol and 3% used tobacco in the last 12 months. While the Adventist Health Message emphasizes vegetarianism, only 14% of the global respondents reported that they practiced this dietary pattern with an additional 5% reporting that they were vegans. The most common dietary response was eating meat no more than once per week, 32%. Almost 60% strongly agreed that the Health Message was related to spiritual growth. Finally, about 23% strongly agreed that keeping the health message guaranteed salvation with

an additional 24% agreeing. There were a few major differences by Divisions of the Church. The North American Division (Canada and the U.S.) was the most likely to be vegetarian or vegan (51%) and this Division was the most likely to strongly disagree that keeping the Health Message guaranteed salvation, 68%.

References

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Abstract

Adventists emphasize the link between health and spirituality. Data from the 2017/8 global church member survey were used to examine attitudes and behavior relative to the Adventist Health Message. A large majority of members accepted the health message. Half of respondents believed that keeping the health message would guarantee salvation.