

Elderly people with religious upbringings are healthier.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2025/12/28/elderly-people-with-religious-upbringings-are-healthier/?msockid=0421f79b0e9467442116e2d80fd96643>

People who had religious childhoods tend to enjoy better physical well-being in later life, study shows

Joe Pinkstone. Science Correspondent. 28 December 2025 2:56pm GMT.

Elderly people who had religious upbringings are physically healthier, according to a study. Scientists said religious communities provided valuable help to a child by preaching a healthy lifestyle without drugs, cigarettes and alcohol. Data from more than 10,000 Europeans over the age of 50 analysed by scientists revealed that those who were raised religious were physically healthier. However, they had poorer mental health as a result of unresolved guilt, psychological pressure and patriarchal elements of religion, the study suggested. It found that people who had a religious upbringing tended to enjoy better physical well-being in later life and reported fewer difficulties with daily activities such as dressing or washing. The study, published in the journal Social Science and Medicine, found that religiosity was more common among lower socio-economic groups, which may turn to it as a way of coping with adversity. The researchers employed an advanced machine learning method to detect complex patterns that traditional statistical techniques may miss.

Rituals provided sense of belonging.

A religious upbringing was defined by whether participants were raised religiously by their parents during childhood. Many children in Europe were brought up after the Second World War in families that attended religious services or learned moral beliefs and values from their parents. For some, those early rituals provided a sense of belonging and meaning but, for others they created pressures that lingered unresolved. The research team said a religious upbringing may function as both a coping mechanism and an indicator of broader socio-economic challenges. Xu Zong, a study author, said: “While religion may offer some benefits, it doesn’t necessarily fully mitigate the health risks linked to long-term disadvantages.”

He said childhood socio-economic challenges may exacerbate health problems in later life. Mr Zong, a doctoral researcher at the University of Helsinki, in Finland, added: “In particular, parental mental health issues and heavy alcohol consumption intensify the negative association between an early religious upbringing and self-rated health in later life.” He said tackling childhood socio-economic disadvantages was key to narrowing health inequalities in later life, explaining: “Investing in children’s social well-being in Finland and other ageing societies is one of the most effective ways to build a healthier, more equal future.”