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Religion as a coping mechanism for health problems and depression among aging Puerto Ricans on the mainland

Marta Rodríguez-Galán

St. John Fisher College, USA

This paper examines the role of religion as a coping mechanism for health among aging Puerto Ricans in the Boston area through the analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews. The findings indicate that religion is a very significant health coping resource for Puerto Ricans dealing with specific health issues, including depression, nerves, high blood pressure, alcohol, tobacco and other addictions, and recovery from illness; as well as an orientation that promotes healthy behaviors. The main forms of coping revolved around the power of faith and prayer, the communal experience, meaning and morality, which were perceived as promoting well-being and improving one's health. Overall, religion had a positive influence on the respondent's sense of wellbeing; however, a few subjects also reported conflicts between a religious orientation and the secular culture within their community. Some also reported possible manipulation by some clergy. An understanding of religious coping experiences among aging Puerto Ricans, and other ethnic minority groups, is essential for clergy, health, and human service professionals working to develop strategies to address their spiritual and health care needs.

mrodriguez-galan@sjfc.edu