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**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOUS INVOLVEMENT AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: FINDINGS FROM THE IRISH LONGITUDINAL STUDY ON AGEING**

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**Background:** Religious involvement has been shown to be protective against negative mental health outcomes and encourage positive coping behaviour among older adults. During the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdown in Ireland, public health restrictions created a barrier to in person religious participation. It is important to examine the effect this may have had on psychological health in older adults.

**Methods:** Data were from The Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA). Data from Wave 4 (2016), Wave 5 (2018) and the COVID-19 SCQ (2020) were used for analysis. The final sample was made up of 3,044 community-dwelling adults living in Ireland aged 60 and older. Relationships between religious participation, psychological health and loneliness were modelled using cross-sectional and longitudinal regression analyses.

**Results:** Religious attendance was positively associated with Purpose in Life [Beta(B)=0.01, 95% CI=-0.00, 0.02,  $p<0.05$ ], Life Satisfaction [B=0.01, 95% CI= 0.00, 0.02,  $p<0.001$ ] and Anxiety [Incident Rate Ratio= 1.04, 95% CI=1.01-1.08,  $p<0.01$ ], during COVID-19. Self-Rated Mental Health significantly decreased between Wave 5 and COVID-19 relative to Religious Attendance reported at Wave 4 [OR= 0.87, 95% CI= 0.75, 0.99,  $p<0.05$ ]. Loneliness also increased between Wave 5 and COVID-19 relative to Prayer Frequency reported at Wave 4 [OR=0.06, 95% CI= 0.02, 0.10,  $p<0.01$ ].

**Conclusion:** These results suggest a complex relationship between psychological health and religious participation and the barriers to it during COVID in the older population. While it there was a protective effect carried into the lockdown, there was also a negative effect regarding some domains of religious participation. Future research should focus on measuring the relationship at later stages of the pandemic and the use of alternative forms of religious practice, such as streaming religious services.