The Effect of Religious Involvement on Cognition across the Aging Lifespan: Protocol for a Systematic Review
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Overview:
- The maintenance of cognitive health is an important component of successful aging.
- Abnormal cognitive decline can signal the onset of dementing disorders such as Alzheimer’s disease (AD).
- Even normal cognitive decline can adversely affect the health of aging populations through loss of function, increased reliance on third-party assistance for help with performing daily tasks, and reduced quality-of-life as a result of limits on one’s ability to maintain a certain lifestyle.

How does religious involvement (RI) affect cognition?
- RI promotes an active, stimulating, and socially engaged lifestyle that can preserve healthy cognitive function.
- Religious practices can maintain dense neocortical brain synapses and delay cognitive deterioration in the elderly.
- RI gives practitioners a greater sense of hope, meaning, and purpose in life, all of which can serve as coping mechanisms against stress, anxiety, and depression.
- For cognition, RI may provide a soothing outlet for feelings of stress and depression.
- Reduced strain on one’s emotional and mental health can help prevent hippocampal atrophy and cognitive decline.

Rationale:
- To systematically review the effects of religion on cognitive function.

Methods:
- We will base the systematic review methods on the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA; Liberati et al., 2010). statement.
- We will extract the following data from included articles: article details (e.g., authors, year, country, setting, length of follow-up), sample characteristics (e.g., age, sex), study design (e.g., case-control, cohort), descriptions of how RI and cognition are measured, lists of covariates included in regression models, and outcomes.
- Qualitative synthesis
- Pooling using DerSimonian and Laird’s random effects meta-analysis.

Assessment of Risk of Bias:
- We will assess the risk of bias of included articles using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale.

Grading the Strength of Evidence:
- We will evaluate the strength of evidence using the Grading of Recommendations Assessment, Development and Evaluation (GRADE) approach.

Data Extraction and Synthesis
- We will search Medline, PsycInfo, Web of Science, and Scopus from database inception to present. Primary studies will be included in the review regardless of language of publication.

References: