



**College of Education**  
**Announcement of Dissertation Defense**

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**Title: THE RELATIONSHIP OF PERCEIVED STRESS, RELIGIOUS COPING STYLES, AND MENTAL HEALTH SYMPTOMS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS**

**ABSTRACT**

This is the first study to investigate the relationship of perceived stress, religious coping styles, and mental health symptoms in university students. Students face a variety of stressors that may be directly, indirectly, or not related to the college experience. If these stressors are left unmanaged, there are multiple implications including reduced retention, declines in academic performance, physical health concerns, and mental health symptoms. University personnel are reporting increases in the number and severity of mental health symptoms presented by university students. This study investigates if religious coping strategies provide a protective barrier to stress and associated mental health symptoms in the college student population. . The sample is comprised of 209 undergraduate students, between the ages of 18-32, from a single faith-based university in South Florida.

Four religious coping styles are investigated to determine if the coping styles function in mediating the relationship between college student stress and mental health symptoms. The four coping styles investigated in this study include; Self-directing, Deferring, Collaborative, and Surrender styles. The relationship between college student stress and subsequent mental health symptoms is investigated to determine the nature of relationship.

This study utilizes Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to examine the relationships between stress, as measured by the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) and mental health symptoms, as measured by the Outcome Questionnaire (OQ-45.2), and religious coping styles. SEM was utilized to determine if there is a mediating effect of each coping style, as measured by the Religious Problem Solving Scales (RPSS) and the Surrender Scale (SS), on the relationship of stress and mental health symptoms in college students in both simple and multiple mediation models. The results of the analysis indicate that college students do experience perceived stress and mental health symptoms. Although all religious coping styles were found to be significant partial mediators in the simple models, none of the coping styles were found to be significant as mediators in the full mediation model. Secondary analyses indicate that denominational affiliation, age, and gender are all correlated with specific religious coping styles. The implications to theory and practice based on these results are discussed.