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People with faith less likely to panic under pressure

Religious people are less likely to panic under pressure than non-believers, according to the results of a new experiment.

By Richard Alleyne, Science Correspondent

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Tests found those who admit they believe in God were less likely to suffer anxiety and stress when asked to perform various mental tasks and, as a result, performed better.

The stronger their belief, the calmer they remained even when they made a mistake, said the study by scientists measuring brain reaction during a set of mental agility tests.



Believers: the stronger their belief, the calmer they remained even when they made a mistake
Photo: GETTY

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However those with a strong religion were also less likely to realise they made mistakes and therefore less likely to fix them, said the report in the journal Psychological Science.

Researchers who questioned the subjects of the experiment said the best performers were not fundamentalists but felt strongly that God had given them "meaning."

But atheist groups said the results do not prove God exists only that having strong beliefs can help, so people may have done just as well if they believed in Father Christmas.

Michael Inzlicht and fellow researchers at the University of Toronto in Canada, asked volunteers to perform a number of tasks such as writing the word 'Red' in blue font and asking subjects to name the colour of the font (many automatically say red).

All the subjects were also questioned about their religious zeal from whether or not they thought God existed to if they thought other religions were less "correct" than their own.

Brain activity was monitored using electrodes which could pick up the amount of activity in the region of the brain dealing with stress, tension and anxiety – the anterior cingulate cortex.

The greater the religious zeal, the less activity in this region of the brain for the tests but even those who were not particularly religious but believed in God did better than non-believers.

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