

Spirituality and Adolescent Well-Being: Selected New Statistics
Peter C. Scales
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In 2003, 148,189 middle and high school students took a survey to determine their levels of assets. The survey, titled *Search Institute Profiles of Student Life: Attitudes and Behaviors (A&B)*, includes two items that are particularly relevant to the topic of spiritual development:

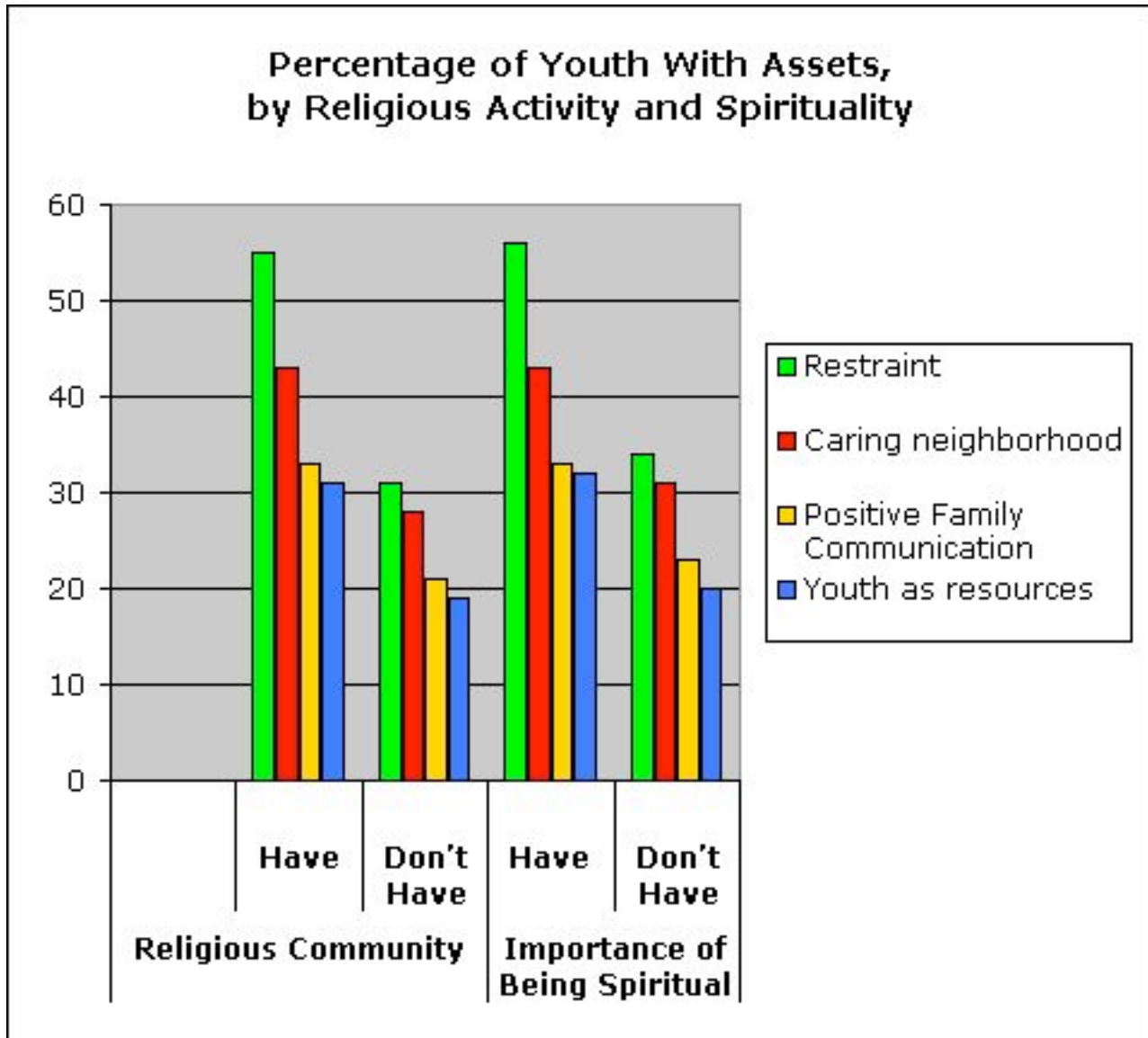
- During an average week, how many hours do you spend going to programs, groups, or services at a church, synagogue, mosque, or other religious or spiritual place?
- How important to you in your life is being religious or spiritual?

When we undertook a new analysis of the 2003 A&B database in regard to those two items, we found that barely a majority—just 58%—of the young people surveyed enjoy the asset of participating in programs or services of a religious community for an hour or more a week. And only 50% say being religious or spiritual is “quite” or “extremely” important to them.

Yet, on a variety of measures, those religiously active and spiritual youth are doing better than their less involved, less spiritual peers. The following specific results refer to young people who participate in religious community an hour or more a week (that is, those who have that asset), but the findings are almost identical among those who say being spiritual is very important to them.

- Religiously active youth are **more** likely to experience almost all of the remaining Developmental Assets. On average, they are 39% more likely to experience the assets than less involved, less spiritual youth.
- By asset category, the biggest differences favoring religiously active and spiritual young people are in the Support assets and the Empowerment assets.
- By individual assets, religiously active and spiritual youth are at least 60% **more** likely to experience the assets of community values youth, youth as resources, service to others, creative activities, and the value of restraint, and 50-59% **more** likely to experience the assets of positive family communication, a caring neighborhood, a caring school climate, parent involvement in schooling, and time in youth programs.

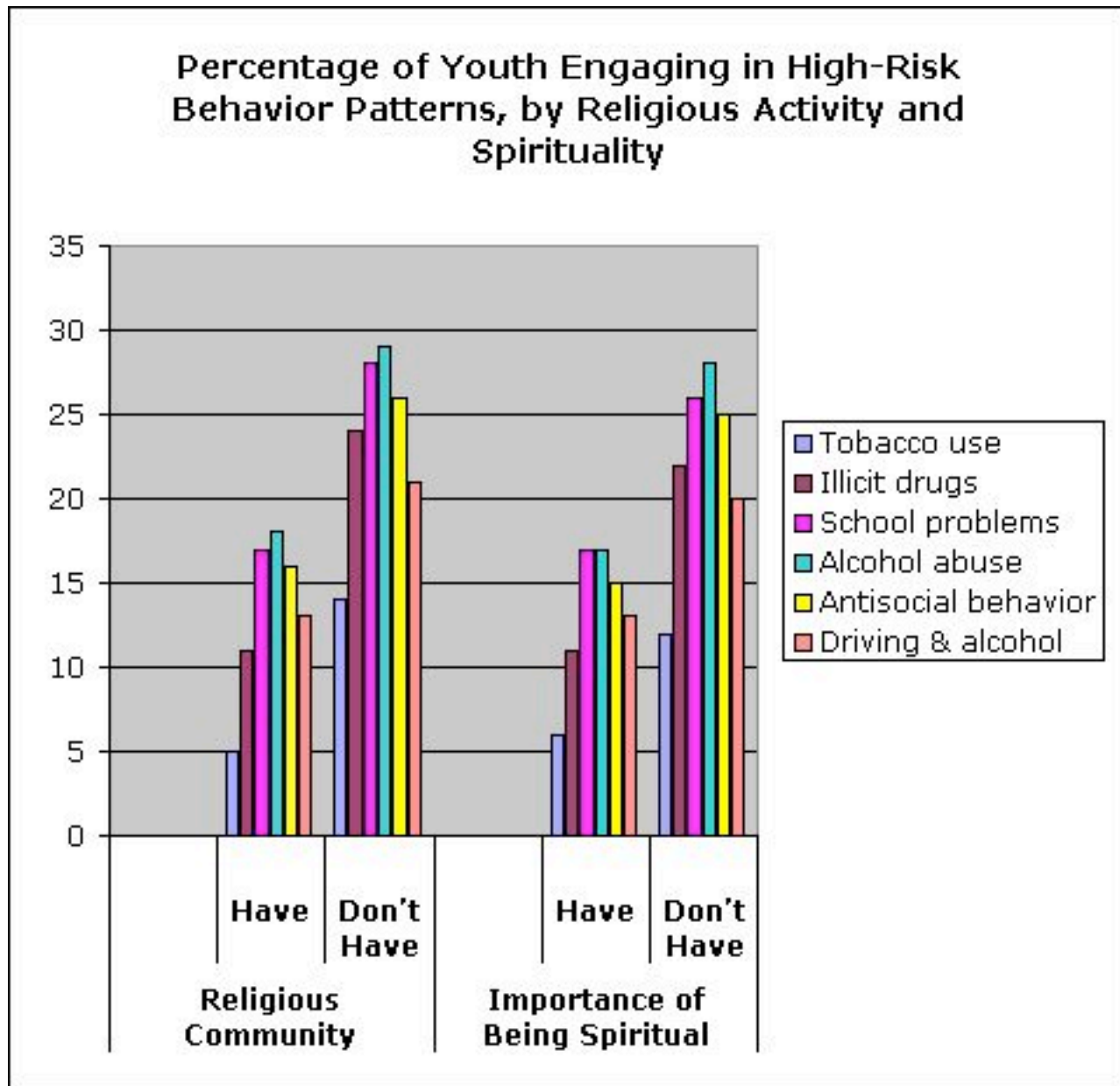
The data suggest that these levels of religious activity and spirituality make a difference in young people’s well-being.



The following specific results are also for young people who participate an hour a week or more, but as with the experience of assets, young people who say spirituality is very important to them also are less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors and to demonstrate thriving.

- Young people who are religiously active are, on average, 39% **less** likely to engage in 10 high-risk behavior patterns, especially use of tobacco, illicit drugs, school problems, alcohol abuse, antisocial behavior, and driving and alcohol.
- In addition, they are, on average, 26% **more** likely to have 8 indicators of thriving, especially getting good grades in school, resisting danger, maintaining physical health, and leadership.

- Likewise, young people who are very spiritual have the same positive outcomes. For example, they are only half as likely to use illicit drugs, 40% as likely to engage in antisocial behavior such as delinquency, and 33% less likely to engage in alcohol abuse.





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Further statistical tests confirm what is seen in these percentage differences in risk and thriving: Religiously active and spiritual youth have significantly better mean scores on every one of the studied high-risk behavior patterns and thriving indicators than do less religiously active, less spiritual young people.

Data based on aggregate Search Institute sample of 148,189 United States students surveyed in 2003. The sample included students in 202 cities in 27 states. Cause and effect cannot be inferred from these results because, although the 2003 sample was large, the young people were not followed over time.