The Role of Religious Beliefs in Youth Mental Health: Support or Risk Factor?

I plan to explore the relationship between religious beliefs and youth mental health, focusing on how religion can both support and harm mental well-being. This topic is relevant due to rising mental health issues among youth, particularly in conservative religious contexts where strict doctrines may increase guilt and exclusion, especially for LGBTQ+ youth. Research indicates that these youth often face higher suicidal ideation due to perceived rejection from their religious communities
Understanding these dynamics can inform better support systems for at-risk youth.

When I read through the NarrativeLE column, I discovered that over 40 victims shot themselves in the church area and upon exploring and researching further I realised that religion has a role to play in youth mental health.

1. Pressure to Conform: Religious communities may exert significant pressure on individuals to conform to certain behavioral norms. For youth who struggle to fit within these norms, this pressure can lead to internal conflicts, resulting in increased mental health risks, including suicidal ideation

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df0.loc[3598, 'NarrativeCME']
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'The V was a XX XX who died of Asphyxia. The manner of death is Suicide. The V had a history of Anxiety, Depression and Suicidal Ideation. The V had been on a church mission when she began to suffer from mental health issu
es. During this time two months ago, the V overdosed on several Advil and Tylenol pills while on her mission. The V sent home and saw a psychiatrist and a therapist. Her demeanor then began to change and  she was extremely
different and began to act out. She started using vape pens and occasionally using Marijuana which were things she had previously stated she would never do. A month ago, the V was rescued off a bridge railing when bystande
rs called 911. The bridge was over several hundreds of feet over water, it appeared to others she may jump. She was admitted to the hospital after the incident. The V was last known to be alive in the evening hours the nig
ht prior when she purchased the helium tank and garbage bags from a store. Police had stopped to check on her vehicle as he noticed the headlights were on during a previous call across the street. He then observed the vehi
cle in the same condition a couple of hours later. The V was found lying in her backseat of her car with a garbage bag over her head in which a party sized helium tank was inside the bag next to her face. Death was pronoun
ced. At autopsy, it was found the V had a tattoo of semicolon on ankle which possibly indicated a suicide attempt survivor. The tattoo appears somewhat recent.  No other circumstances are known.'
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2. Religious Guilt and Shame: Strict religious doctrines that condemn certain behaviors or identities (e.g., LGBTQ+ individuals) can increase feelings of guilt, unworthiness, and hopelessness among youth. This is particularly common in communities with conservative religious values. For example, a study found that young people who struggled with their sexual orientation in conservative religious communities were at higher risk of suicidal ideation due to rejection or fear of punishment by their faith

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df0[df0.NarrativeLE.str.contains('blackmail')==True]
df0.loc[468, 'NarrativeCME']
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'This XX XX XX, not XX V died by asphyxia due to ligature hanging.  The manner of death is suicide.  The V was found hanging in his apartment by a friend after family members were unable to get in touch with the V.  The fr
iend had a spare key to the V\'s apartment and found the V at about 2250 hours suspended by a rope in his locked apartment.  The V left a long note explaining that he didn\'t want to be gay and he can\'t take it anymore.
He stated "I\'ve struggled with my sexuality, not knowing who I am for too long.  I\'ve never wanted to be gay.  I always wanted my own wife and kids.  It eats me alive that I think I\'ll never be able to have kids. . ."  T
he V\'s sister stated the V was gay and was unable to reconcile this with his parents and God. Religious notes and Bible quotes were observed at the scene.  The V had a history of depression but no previous attempts or ide
ations.'
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Methods Experimented:

Data processing: here are the techniques applied for data processing;

Tokenize: the process by which sentences are converted to a list of tokens or words.

Remove stopwords lemmatize: reduces the inflectional forms of each word into a common base or root.

Convert to the bag of words: Bag of words is a dictionary where the keys are words(or ngrams/tokens) and values are the number of times each word occurs in the corpus.
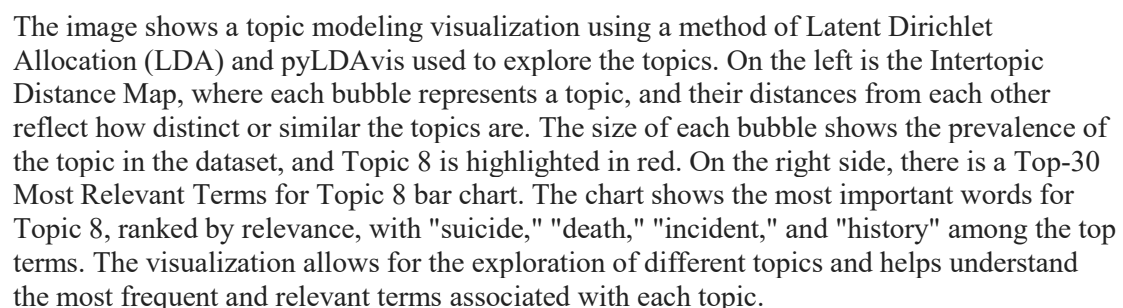
Key features: The key features focused on are the CME and LE Narratives, CME and LE CircumstancesOtherText.

model used: gensim lda_model and pyLDAvis(for visualizing topics) model result: the model generated a list of keywords classified as topics. Each topic generated by the LDA model represents a cluster of terms that tend to appear together in the narratives. The weights indicate the importance of each word in the context of that topic. which represents a list of keywords and their associated weights. Each keywords serves as insights that help to identify different patterns of suicide based on narrative, which reveals underlying circumstances or

common factors leading to youth suicides. We were able to extract this topics by interpreting the insights as described in the narratives.

Other methods i planned to test is BERT and reason I intend using it is because it is a pre trained model which understands context and flexible for tasks requiring nuanced comprehension and accurate information retrieval.

Exploring *religion* as a factor in youth suicide, key variables include:

1. Religious Affiliation: Different religions may influence mental health in varying ways.
2. Religious Commitment: Higher religious involvement can either protect or increase suicide risk depending on individual experiences.
3. Religious Doctrines: Teachings on sin, suffering, or suicide can contribute to guilt or shame.
4. Perceived Acceptance: Youth who feel excluded, especially LGBTQ+ individuals, face higher suicide risks.
5. Stigma Around Mental Health: Religious stigma may prevent youth from seeking help.

Preliminary findings show that religion can provide support, but strict doctrines may lead to guilt and exclusion, especially for LGBTQ+ youth, increasing suicidal ideation due to rejection

Visualization;

The image shows a topic modeling visualization using a method of Latent Dirichlet Allocation (LDA) and pyLDAvis used to explore the topics. On the left is the Intertopic Distance Map, where each bubble represents a topic, and their distances from each other reflect how distinct or similar the topics are. The size of each bubble shows the prevalence of the topic in the dataset, and Topic 8 is highlighted in red. On the right side, there is a Top-30 Most Relevant Terms for Topic 8 bar chart. The chart shows the most important words for Topic 8, ranked by relevance, with "suicide," "death," "incident," and "history" among the top terms. The visualization allows for the exploration of different topics and helps understand the most frequent and relevant terms associated with each topic.

References.

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