

## **Stephen Hawking bashes religion, but what does new paper say about God?**

8 AUG - CBS News - Physicist Stephen Hawking has given religion a cosmic thumbs-down, calling the idea of heaven "a fairy story" in a recent interview. But researchers say faith can have measurable psychological benefits.

Case in point: A paper published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology indicates that people who believe in a benevolent God are less bothered by the vagaries of life than those who believe in a deity that is indifferent or punitive.

The paper was based on two recent studies. The first, which involved 332 Christians and Jews, showed that those who trusted in God to look out for them worry less and are more tolerant of uncertainty than those who mistrusted God.

The second study involved 125 Jews who participated in a two-week audio-video program aimed at increasing their trust in God. It showed that those who participated reported significant decreases in worry and psychological stress.

"We found that the positive beliefs of trust in God were associated with less worry and that this relationship was partially mediated by lower levels of intolerance of uncertainty," the authors of the study - including Harvard-affiliated psychologist Dr. David Rosmarin - said in a written statement. "Conversely, the negative beliefs of mistrust in God correlated with higher worry and intolerance."

The paper noted that studies have shown that 93 percent of people believe in God or a higher power and that 50 percent say that religion is important to them. Hawking, whose long battle with a deadly neurological disease has left him withered and wheelchair-bound, certainly isn't one of them.

"I have lived with the prospect of an early death for the last 49 years," he told the Guardian, adding, "I regard the brain as a computer which will stop working when its components fail. There is no heaven or afterlife for broken down computers; that is a fairy story for people afraid of the dark."