



### ***American Worldview Inventory 2024 (Release #5)*** **Research Suggests Consequences of Anti-Biblical Worldview** **Often Misdiagnosed and Treated as Mental Illness**

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The latest worldview research from Dr. George Barna of the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University presents a chilling possibility: Hundreds of thousands of Americans are spending tens of millions of dollars and numerous hours investing in drugs and mental health solutions that are treating the wrong problem.

Based on several recent studies exploring adults who admit to frequently struggling with anxiety, depression, and fear, Barna and his colleagues suggest that addressing those conditions may not require counseling, hospitalization, drugs, or other common remedies.

The research instead indicates that those are often symptoms of an unhealthy worldview that produces and reinforces the emergence of anxiety, depression, fear, and even suicidal thoughts.

Instead of turning to mental health treatments, the best prescription for millions of Americans is to embrace a more reliable and proven worldview, according to Barna.

Barna is not suggesting that everyone's mental health issues are caused by worldview deficiencies. He readily acknowledges that some people have mental impairments caused by chemical imbalances, genetic issues, physical or biological challenges, or other conditions.

But for many people, the failure to recognize the consequences of harmful worldview beliefs and behaviors may result in costly, futile, and potentially debilitating misdiagnoses.

#### **Tens of Millions Identified**

Studies by federal government agencies assert that one out of every four adults (23%) have some type of mental illness. Among the youngest two generations (Millennials and Gen Z), one out of every three people (33%) is estimated to have one or more diagnosable mental disorders. Among the most common of those mental illnesses are anxiety disorders, common to one out of five adults (19%), and substance addiction, also present among nearly one-fifth of adults (18%).

Young adults are those most likely to have had physical manifestations of their disorders during the past 12 months. For instance, while 8% of all adults experienced a major depressive episode in the past year, at least twice as many in Gen Z (19%) and among Millennials (16%) had such an incident. Similarly, although 5% of adults had serious suicidal thoughts at least once in the past year, such thoughts occurred in much higher proportions within Gen Z (13%) and Millennials (9%).

If those incidence statistics are projected to the total adult population, an estimated 60 million

individuals have at least one diagnosable mental disorder. Slightly more than 50 million adults have some type of anxiety disorder. And nearly 50 million adults struggle with alcohol or drug addiction.

**The Relationship of Mental Health and Worldview**

Having studied worldview for more than three decades, Barna often reminds people that because “you do what you believe,” worldview determines lifestyle. In this latest research, the ACU professor points out that worldview is also partly responsible for mental health.

Using data from the latest *American Worldview Inventory*, conducted annually by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University, Barna identified a moderately strong inverse correlation between worldview and the frequent presence of anxiety, depression, or significant fear. In fact, individuals who lack a biblical worldview are more likely to struggle with these common mental health issues.

Shockingly, a majority of adults from Gen Z (56%) report experiencing regular bouts of anxiety, depression, or crippling fear in the past year. That same generational segment has the lowest incidence of biblical worldview possession (1%).

Roughly half of Millennials (49%) have frequently entertained anxiety, depression, or major episodes of fear, while only 2% of that generation holds a biblical worldview.

The numbers are notably better among Gen X, for which a somewhat lower proportion (39%) often deal with anxiety, depression and fear, while possessing a somewhat higher incidence of biblical worldview (4%, double the proportion among Millennials). At the older end of the adult continuum, one out of every seven Boomers (14%) often undergo anxiety, depression, and fear, the lowest level among the four generations, while that segment also had the highest incidence of biblical worldview (8%).

<b>Young Adults Embrace Beliefs that Produce Anxiety, Depression, Fear, and Worse</b>			
<b>Generation</b>	<b>Often A, D, F</b>	<b>% with a BWV</b>	<b>% of US Adults</b>
Gen Z	56%	1%	7%
Millennials	49%	2%	32%
Gen X	39%	4%	34%
Baby Boomers	14%	8%	25%

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2024*, conducted by Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Nationally representative survey of 2,000 adults, 18 or older.

Abbreviations and definitions: Gen Z includes people born from 2003-2021, with the adult portion being those born from 2003-2006; Millennials were born from 1984-2002; Gen X were born 1965-1983; Baby Boomers were born 1946-1964. “BWV” refers to a biblical worldview. “Often A,D,F” indicates people who say they often experience anxiety, depression, or feeling unsafe.

## **Contributing Beliefs**

The research also identified more than a dozen common beliefs that are prone to producing frequent feelings of anxiety, depression, or fear—all of these beliefs conflict with biblical principles and teaching. Some of the more prominent contributors to such mental challenges are described below.

### ***No Purpose in Life***

Seven out of 10 people under the age of 40 lack a sense of purpose and meaning in life. That void commonly produces a range of negative emotions. It appears common that individuals who lack purpose in life begin to question why they should bother living, or how it is possible to experience desirable emotions such as joy, happiness, fulfillment, and contentment.

Biblically, humans are known to have two perspectives on purpose. The first is general purpose, which is that we are created by God's in order to know, love, and serve Him with all of our heart and soul, mind, and strength. The more focused, individualized sense of purpose is based on personal calling. Each individual who is called by God to such purpose is given gifts, abilities, and other resources specifically to prepare them to thrive in the pursuit of that purpose.

### ***Rejecting the God of Israel***

In total, about three out of 10 Gen Z and Millennial adults qualify as “Don'ts”—people who don't believe that God exists (atheists), don't know if God exists (agnostics), or don't care if God exists (the indifferent).

The segment that rejects God, perhaps not surprisingly, is more prone to wrestling with the stresses created by their godless world. More than four out of five of these individuals often experience anxiety, depression, fear, and other insecurities, a condition that correlates with their dismissal of a powerful, loving, merciful God who is in charge of the universe and has provided a guidebook for the best way to live (the Bible).

### ***Denying Objective, Knowable Truth***

Struggling with anxiety, depression, and fear on a constant basis seems like a predictable outcome if you reject the existence of absolute moral truth. If truth is always subjective and circumstantial, insecurity seems like a natural result. The research revealed that just 13% of those in Gen Z and less than one-fourth of Millennials (22%) believe that absolute moral truth exists and is an objective reality, apart from personal preferences and determinations.

### ***Reincarnation and Salvation***

A majority of adults younger than 40 believes that they may be reincarnated. The uncertainties related to that possibility—e.g., whether they will be reincarnated and what they will return as—coincide with fear and psychological stress among a majority of those adults. Individuals with the biblical worldview, however, reject the possibility of reincarnation and typically experience serenity about their eternal journey based on their understanding that their personal confession of their sins and acceptance of Christ as their savior has delivered them from eternal suffering or uncertainty.

The gateway to confusion over reincarnation is the fact that just one-fifth of the under-40 population believes that humans are born into sin and need to be rescued from its consequences. Barely one-quarter of the under-40 segment believes that they will go to Heaven after they die based solely on the

death and resurrection of Christ for their sins. The alternative embraced by most adults under 40 is self-reliance and stellar performance.

The uncertainty of the standards that must be met to achieve their goals—be it perfection, constant improvement, outperforming others, or self-fulfillment—potentially introduce debilitating levels of self-doubt, disappointment, a sense of failure, and even anger that ultimately leads to anxiety, depression, or fear.

### ***A Variety of Unbiblical Beliefs***

Among the other unbiblical beliefs uncovered in the survey that contribute to what health care professionals could unwittingly identify as “mental illness” are the following:

- Adopting primary sources of moral guidance other than the Bible (embraced by 74% of those who often experience anxiety, depression, or fear)
- Animals, plants, wind, and water have unique spirits (71%)
- You do not believe in the existence of an all-powerful, all-knowing, perfect, and just creator of the universe who rules that universe today (58%)
- As long as you do no harm to others, you can do whatever you want (52%)
- To be happy you must sometimes ignore or disobey rules and laws (52%)
- Gifted mediums can communicate with the spirits of dead people (46%)
- You are scared to die (44%)
- Avoiding interaction with other people who have significantly different social and political views (43%)
- A very important force or guide for your life is Mother Earth or the Universe (40%)

The research also uncovered an important gap in the religious behavior of those who often experience anxiety, depression, or fear, compared to those who do not. Specifically, individuals who are less likely to suffer from those challenges are substantially more likely to consciously make time to thank, praise, and worship God every day; to attend church services every week; and to commit to knowing and doing God’s will each day.

Aspects of politics and governance are also related to a person’s mental health, as measured in the survey. For instance, individuals who distance themselves from both political engagement and active participation in the Christian faith were significantly more likely to frequently experience incidents of anxiety, depression, and fear.

Similarly, a person’s political ideology appears to be related to their mental health. Adults who consistently adopt liberal or progressive positions on current issues are more likely to endure bouts of anxiety, depression, and fear than are those who consistently adopt conservative positions. Likewise, inconsistent voting is associated with a greater frequency of anxiety, depression, or fear.

Different Beliefs and Behaviors Between Adults Who Do and Do Not Often Experience Anxiety, Depression, and Fear		
Often Experience Anxiety, Depression, Fear		
Belief or Behavior	Yes	No
Disengaged from both political involvement and the Christian faith	82%	67%
To be happy, sometimes you have to ignore or disobey rules and laws	52%	36%
As long as you do no harm to others, you can do whatever you want	52%	38%
Gifted mediums can communicate with the spirits of dead people	46%	34%
You are scared to die	44%	24%
An important guide for your life is Mother Earth or the Universe	40%	25%
On social and political issues, your views are consistently liberal	38%	22%
Hatred and aggression are necessary for personal survival	34%	19%
You consciously and intentionally take time to thank, praise, and worship God every day	30%	42%
You vote in every General and Primary election	26%	40%
You are a recovering addict	23%	9%
Identify as LGBTQ	19%	7%

Source: *American Worldview Inventory 2024*, conducted by the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University. Nationally representative survey of 2,000 adults, 18 or older.

### Discovering the Mental Map of Young Adults

Recent studies developed by George Barna through the Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University have paved the way toward understanding the mental pathways and landmines faced by millions of young adults. Americans create unique mental maps of how life works and their role in the world, and live according to that worldview.

“A person’s worldview drives every decision they make, every moment of every day,” Barna explained.

"We combine a plethora of perspectives to understand life, truth, authority, morality, our place and impact on the world, and more. As we map the beliefs and behaviors of individuals, we can visualize their true identity and predict their feelings, lifestyles, relationships, faith choices, and more."

"It is not uncommon," the veteran researcher continued, "to find a young adult who trusts feelings more than facts, sees no inherent value to life, believes in Karma, and rejects the existence of the biblical God and the availability of eternal security available through Jesus Christ."

Barna further explained, "Add to this a lack of any sense of purpose, meaning or inherent value to human life, and the idea that truth is personal, subjective, and circumstantial. The lifestyle that results from this fairly common set of components is likely to be one that is inconsistent, chaotic, frustrating, and lacking in hope and lasting attachments. It would be a life in which anxiety, depression, and fear would be virtually inescapable as a result of those choices."

However, Barna contended that such an unfulfilling and psychologically unstable life is easily avoidable. "The conditions I described are surprisingly common, but that's because they reflect aspects of the most prevalent worldview of young adults, which is [Syncretism](#), as influenced by today's culture" he stated.

"If the individual instead embraced the core tenets of the biblical worldview, their life would not be perfect but they would likely avoid many of the pitfalls and frustrations produced by the syncretistic explanation of life," Barna said.

### **Worldview Development as a Means of Healing**

The research regarding worldview and mental health led Barna and his colleagues to caution readers neither to dismiss the reality of mental illness nor to devalue the importance of conventional mental health protocols.

"There are certainly many situations that merit conventional mental health treatments such as counseling, prescription drugs, physical therapy, and institutionalization," Barna explained. "But this research does raise the possibility that there are also situations where a patient suffering from a psychological or emotional disorder attributable to worldview components that trigger and sustain the condition."

"In situations where an errant worldview has caused anxiety, depression, fear, certain phobias, anti-social behaviors, OCD, attachment disorder, and even insomnia, all the conventional treatments in the world will be fruitless," he explained. "I suspect that may explain why some people spend years and lots of money on treatments that provide no relief."

Barna noted that adults with a biblical worldview are less likely to often feel anxious, depressed or fearful and that the biblical worldview is related to those who possess it avoiding many of the life events and outcomes that produce anxiety, depression, and fear—such as spending time in jail or prison, being responsible for an abortion, succumbing to an addiction, and undergoing a divorce. Instead, the research indicates that people whose view of life harmonizes with biblical principles are significantly more likely to experience a happy and fulfilling life.

"People do not frequently experience anxiety, depression, or fear as a result of possessing the biblical worldview," the ACU professor continued. "The profile of those who possess a biblical worldview also tend to have longer-lasting and happier marriages, a clear and compelling sense of meaning in life, more enduring and satisfying relationships, greater spiritual clarity and joy, a deeper commitment to forgiving other people, and regular engagement in service to other people."

According to Barna, these findings represent a compelling call to parents and churches to take the worldview development of children seriously. As described in his latest research-driven book, *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind, and Soul*, a person's worldview is typically developed by the age of 13, and usually changes little after that time. Investing heavily in shaping children's worldview with biblical truth could be a culture-transforming and cost-effective step forward in improving the mental health of America.

### **About the Research**

The data referred to in this report are taken from the *American Worldview Inventory (AWVI)*, an annual survey that evaluates the worldview of the U.S. adult population (age 18 and over). Begun as an annual tracking study in 2020, the assessment is based on several dozen worldview-related questions that fall within eight categories of worldview application, measuring both beliefs and behavior.

The *American Worldview Inventory* is the first-ever national survey conducted in the United States measuring the incidence of both biblical and competing worldviews. The current wave of worldview research was undertaken in January 2024 among a nationally representative sample of 2,000 adults, providing an estimated maximum sampling error of approximately plus or minus 2 percentage points, based on the 95% confidence interval. Additional levels of indeterminable error may occur in surveys based upon both sampling and non-sampling activity.

The research utilized for this report are based upon the baseline questionnaire used since 2020 for the annual *AWVI*, with additional response options included in many questions to represent the perspectives of previously unexamined worldviews. Those additional worldviews incorporated into this study were Animism, Islam, Judaism, Mormonism, Satanism, and Wicca. The eight previously studied worldviews that were again represented in the survey were Biblical Theism, Marxism, Moralistic Therapeutic Deism, Nihilism, Pantheism (i.e. Eastern Mysticism), Postmodernism, Secular Humanism, and Syncretism.

### **About the Cultural Research Center**

The Cultural Research Center at Arizona Christian University in Glendale, Arizona, conducts the annual *American Worldview Inventory* as well as other nationwide surveys regarding worldview and cultural transformation. National studies completed by the Cultural Research Center (CRC) have investigated topics related to family, values, lifestyle, spiritual practices, and politics.

One of the groundbreaking efforts by CRC has been the worldview-related surveys conducted among the ACU student population. The first-of-its-kind *ACU Student Worldview Inventory* is administered to every ACU student at the start of each academic year, and a final time just prior to graduation. The results of that student census enable the University to track and address the worldview development of its students from a longitudinal perspective.

CRC is guided by Dr. George Barna, Director of Research, and Dr. Tracy Munsil, Executive Director. Like ACU, CRC embraces biblical Christianity. The Center works in cooperation with a variety of Bible-centric, theologically conservative Christian ministries and remains politically non-partisan. Results from past surveys conducted by CRC and information about the Cultural Research Center are available at [www.CulturalResearchCenter.com](http://www.CulturalResearchCenter.com).

Further information about Arizona Christian University is available at [www.ArizonaChristian.edu](http://www.ArizonaChristian.edu).

## **About George Barna and *Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul***

In addition to being a professor at Arizona Christian University and Director of Research of the Cultural Research Center at ACU, George Barna is a veteran researcher of 40-plus years and author of 60 books. His most recent book is [\*Raising Spiritual Champions: Nurturing Your Child's Heart, Mind and Soul\*](#), which immediately became a bestseller on Amazon upon its release in late 2023.

*Raising Spiritual Champions*, published by [Arizona Christian University Press](#) in collaboration with [Family Research Council](#) (Washington, D.C.) and Texas-based [Fedd Books](#), covers a variety of topics helpful to parents and Christian leaders. The volume includes research-based descriptions of how a child's worldview develops; the relationships between worldview and discipleship; how parents can develop a simple plan to guide their child to a biblical worldview, and how to become a disciple of Jesus Christ; the role churches and godly church leaders can play in that process; measuring the worldview of children; and more.

[Click here](#) for more information about *Raising Spiritual Champions* or visit [www.RaisingSpiritualChampionsBook.com](http://www.RaisingSpiritualChampionsBook.com). For information about discounts for quantity orders, email [info@culturalresearchcenter.com](mailto:info@culturalresearchcenter.com).