

(1994) found that although there was a reduction in insulin dosage over a period of two weeks in the treatment condition compared to the control condition, the difference was not statistically significant.

Although Byrd's (1988) study provides some evidence of a causal effect of prayer on medical outcomes, there have been no comparable studies examining the potential causal effects of prayer outside a medical setting. One important setting in which to study prayer is the workplace, where prayer may address issues such as potential interpersonal conflict and the pressures inherent in most workplaces (such as deadlines and performance evaluations). The workplace clearly represents an untapped area for research into the possible causal effects of intercessory prayer.

The specific purpose of the present study was to utilize the double-blind methodology of Byrd's (1988) study on health outcomes to evaluate the "distance" effects (Dossey, 1997; Schlitz, 1997) of intercessory prayer (prayer without the individual's presence or awareness) on occupational task performance. In a health care customer service call center, will individuals receiving prayer evidence different levels of task performance (number of calls answered per hour and number of seconds per call) compared to individuals who are not receiving prayer?

## **Method**

### **Participants**

Research participants were 103 trained customer service call center representatives (9 men and 94 women) all residing in southern California.<sup>1</sup> The mean age for the men was 34.0 years ( $SD = 8.8$ ), and the mean age for the women was 37.3 years ( $SD = 8.2$ ). Ethnicity of participants was not evaluated. All study participants had at least six months and no more than two years experience in this customer service call center environment. Primary responsibilities of the customer service representatives were to respond to member questions concerning health care coverage and to attempt to resolve member complaints. Participants worked in a controlled environment at individual pod-like workstations, which were grouped in clusters of five. Each used identical computer and phone answering equipment. Calls were distributed equally as

representatives were available.

Two women (ages 36 and 55) served as prayer intercessors for the study. The intercessors were self-identified Christians who were active participants in prayer ministries in a local United Methodist church.

### **Apparatus**

Data on answer speed and call handling time was attained utilizing the Northern Telecom Meridian Max call reporting system. A daily prayer log sheet was used as a self report by prayer intercessors.

### **Procedure**

Participants were randomly assigned by gender- and age-matched pairs to prayer and non-prayer groups. Participants had no knowledge that a study on intercessory prayer was being conducted, but they were aware of ongoing monitoring of their phone interactions with customers. Permission to use these data for the current study was obtained. Customer service representatives in the prayer group were assigned to two prayer intercessors who had no prior knowledge of the participants. Intercessors were provided with general information related to potential work environment challenges and specific information (age, gender, and identification number) about those for whom they were to pray. They were directed to offer daily specific prayers for efficiency, alertness, and wisdom with members' issues. Most prayers were 3-5 minutes in length. Intercessors recorded daily prayer "events" for each individual.

The study period spanned a 7-day pretest period (11/3/96 to 11/9/96) and a 14-day experimental period (11/10/96 to 11/23/96). Daily measurements of number of calls answered per hour and call handling time (number of seconds per call) were obtained.

### **Results**

For each participant, the mean number of calls per hour and the mean number of seconds per call for both the seven-day pretest period and the fourteen-day experimental period were obtained. Table 1 presents, for both prayer and non-prayer groups, the means and standard deviations of both measures (calls per hour and seconds per call) for both pretest period and