



## THE ROLE OF SPIRITUALITY AND RELIGIOSITY IN INDIVIDUAL WELL-BEING

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### Abstract:

A great deal of study has focused on modifiable elements that might enhance physical health and psychological well-being in later life, emphasising the ageing process as a worldwide, multifaceted problem. This is especially true for industrialised and developing nations, both of which are expected to have long-term problems with health and psychological care as their populations become older. This study attempts to explore recent advancements in our understanding of middle and late-life well-being within the theoretical framework of successful ageing and developmental psychology in order to better understand the function of well-being and spirituality/religiosity throughout adulthood.

**Keywords:** spirituality, religious status, well-being, life satisfaction, religious identity

### Introduction:

The degree of commitment to the customs, traditions, values, and beliefs of an established religion is known as religiosity (Jensen, 2021). In developmental research, religiosity is often divided into two categories: personal salience of religious ideas and perceived relevance of religion in one's life, and religious practise, which includes attending religious services, joining a faith-based community, and praying (Yonker et al., 2012).

Faith Formation Theory is one of the most significant theoretical viewpoints on religious development (Fowler, 1981). In accordance with Piaget's cognitive developmental theory, Fowler hypothesised a series of phases of faith formation from infancy through adolescence that mirror cognitive, moral, and identity development. Early teenagers (ages 12–13) start to build internalised, abstract ideas that go along with early formal, operational thinking. However, they generally have traditional religious views that are largely the same as those of their parents. After the age of 14, religious beliefs may grow more nuanced and integral to a person's value system, transcending rituals and communal support. By early adulthood (about age 20), this process—which is followed by a more comprehensive reinvention of identity—should be finished (Parker, 2010). Although this theory has come under fire for suggesting unchanging phases and hardly considering interindividual heterogeneity, it is nevertheless useful since it highlighted adolescence as a critical time in the development of religiosity (Schnitker et al., 2021). Most of the developmental psychology currently takes a developmental systems approach on religion's emergence, emphasising people's individual growth trajectories and their active participation in their sociocultural setting (Magnusson and Stattin, 2006). Particularly, religious growth is

impacted by both macrosystems (such as historical and sociocultural factors) and proximal microsystems (such as family, peer interactions, and school) (King and Roeser 2009).

In respect to the different potentially hazardous circumstances that may develop in adolescence, religion has been shown in several studies to have a protective function. Adherence to traditional values, which oppose transgression activities, has a protective function in connection to teenagers' participation in externalised difficulties (Hardy et al., 2019). Additionally, religion is linked to greater self-control and the capacity to manage emotions, which prevent risky actions (Holmes et al., 2019). Additionally, faith-based organisations exercise some kind of social control through promoting moral principles that are opposed to deviant conduct (King, 2003). Additionally, religion may be beneficial for preventing teenage sadness and internalised symptoms (Cooley et al., 2021). Indeed, placing a high emphasis on religion may help and soothe people in overcoming personal challenges. Adolescents may face peers and adults in structured religious settings, obtain psychological support, and counteract loneliness thanks to their religion.

Although studies have lately started to concentrate especially on the function of religion in fostering healthy adolescent development and well-being, the protective impact of religiosity regarding externalised and internalised hazards is acknowledged (Iannello et al., 2020). The Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach (Lerner et al., 2009) views religion as a resource that supports young people's growth and development both personally and socially. Particularly, it has been shown that religion has a favourable effect on prosocial conduct, social abilities, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction (Abdollahzadeh Rafi et al., 2020). Particularly, emphasis on religiosity has a considerable favourable effect on psychological health that goes beyond engagement in religion and the frequency of public or private prayer (Hardy et al., 2019).

The current research, which made use of the PYD theoretical framework, sought to determine how a group of Italian teenage participants' subjective well-being and the value placed on religion are connected. The research focused in particular on the private component of teenagers' religiosity, which relates to how significant they believe their religious beliefs are to their everyday lives and problem-solving (Hardy et al., 2019).

Due to the growth of faith and the combination of personal and environmental factors, the importance of religion is a characteristic that evolves throughout adolescence (King and Roeser, 2009). While religious activity normally declines throughout adolescence and early adulthood, this fall in prominence of religion differs depending on the cultural setting (Schnitker et al., 2021). In contrast to the secularisation that defines a sizable portion of the population, a tendency that can be seen in many Western nations is the fall of religiosity in adolescence (Jensen, 2021). Due to the significance of Catholicism in Italian culture and society, the country is in a unique situation in this respect. Particularly, when compared to other Catholic nations in Europe, the drop in religiosity among Italian young has peculiar features (Garelli, 2016). It is estimated that 30% of young people in Italy (aged 13 to 19) do not believe in God. Although their number has grown over the last two decades, it is still less than that of other European nations (such as France, Sweden, and Germany), where it is between 50% and 60%. (ISTAT, 2020; Pew Research Center, 2018). The majority of Italian teenagers identify as Catholics, and the majority of people in Italy (about 75% of the population) practise Catholicism (ISTAT, 2020). Other faiths are becoming more prevalent, particularly as a result of immigration, and Muslims are the most prevalent group, albeit their representation in Italy is still lower than that of other European nations (around 4.5% of the population compared to an average of 6.8% in Europe) (Molteni and Dimitriadis, 2021). Adolescents in Italy exhibit varied degrees of Catholicism attachment. Most of them identify as "Catholic by tradition or education," and they are teenagers who do not necessarily engage in religious activities but who identify as Catholic because of a cultural impact that is still pervasive in the Italian setting (Garelli, 2013).

Although most of the research have been done in the United States and Northern European nations, it has been shown that the significance of religion is connected with improved well-being among teenagers (Ciarrochi and Heaven, 2012). Given that culture is anticipated to play a significant role in the relationship between the significance of religion and adjustment, it is worthwhile to investigate the matter in Italy, a country where the Catholic tradition still exerts a significant cultural influence and where studies focusing on adolescents are still lacking (Ciziceno, 2021).

There are certain weaknesses in earlier developmental psychology studies on the role of religion in healthy adolescent development that might be fixed. First off, prior study often only considered the emotional or cognitive aspects of subjective well-being (Yunker et al., 2012). The current research looked at the emotive dimension, which is the proportion of happy to negative feelings, and the cognitive dimension, which is the level of life satisfaction, in order to close this gap (Deetj and Ryan, 2008).

The inadequate assessment of the impact of putative mediating and moderating variables on the link between the significance of religion and favourable outcomes is a second flaw in the available research (Lannello et al., 2020). To better understand the processes behind the association between religion and adjustment, it is crucial to consider the function of intervening factors. According to several studies, religion is associated with increased optimism (Inguglia et al., 2017) and self-esteem (King and Roeser, 2009), both of which support improved adolescent adjustment. However, little study has been done on the subject, especially in the period leading up to adolescence. Therefore, it is important to comprehend how elevating personal positive resources might improve teenage wellbeing by increasing the value put on religious beliefs. Due to this, we concentrated on positivity, which is an evaluative disposition that favours an optimistic outlook on oneself, life, and the future (Caprara et al., 2017). Although positivity is a broad concept linked to improved adjustment, the connection between positivity and religion has not been well investigated (Miloni et al., 2016). In the current research, we looked at whether the significance of religion has a direct or indirect positive relationship with emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction. The shift from early adolescence to adolescent occurs at the same time as the move from middle to high school. Given that it progressively devalues religious ideas and behaviours, existing research suggests that this change may also be significant for religiosity (Fowler and Dell, 2006; Jensen, 2021). However, there aren't many research on this subject in the context of Italian Catholicism.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

To examine the relationship between the importance of religion and affective well-being.

To examine the association between Religiosity, Spirituality, and Subjective Well-Being.

#### **Method:**

#### **Discussion and findings:**

##### **Relationship between the Importance of religion and affective well-being:**

The idea of well-being may be expanded to include both the absence of issues with one's physical and mental health as well as a subjective experience of satisfaction that consists of both a cognitive and an emotive component. This subjective perception of one's quality of life, especially as one becomes older, often has the most influence on how they behave and see their lives. According to Kahneman, Diener, and Schwarz, eudemonic well-being focuses on people's perceptions of the meaning and purpose of their lives, whereas hedonic well-being refers to ordinary emotions like the experience of happiness, anger, or grief. Subjective well-being also has a sense of life evaluation.

According to developmental psychology, older adulthood is characterised by the drive to find meaning and purpose in life as well as the need to feel generatively, or as if one has contributed something significant to the next generation. Existential anxiety, which may become more noticeable in later life as increasing physical limits and the death of loved ones force older persons to think more about their own mortality, can be mitigated by having a sense of meaning and purpose. Numerous studies have shown a strong correlation between finding meaning and purpose in life and a variety of beneficial well-being outcomes.

Social connectivity is a crucial viewpoint for understanding wellbeing in later life. The results of older individuals' well-being on a variety of crucial aspects are better when they retain relationships with other people. Being socially connected may be advantageous in a variety of ways. Others may most immediately aid by offering practical support in addressing daily requirements (such as assistance with transportation for medical treatment or assistance with home maintenance). However, the emotional support that strong social ties may provide may be more advantageous, enhancing quality of life and psychological well-being. However,

there is evidence that older adults tend to benefit most from concentrating on a smaller number of higher-quality relationships rather than maintaining a larger network of relatively superficial ties, so the number of social ties may not always be the best metric for conceptualising this connectedness.

The importance of religious belief and engagement has a significant impact in older adult well-being. Religion may be seen of as a complicated and varied phenomena comprising components of social identity, behaviour, and community engagement. The pursuit of humanity's connectivity and a person's longing for a personal connection with a higher power, on the other hand, may be considered as spirituality. This pursuit can take place within or outside of a formal religious setting. Numerous studies have linked religious and spiritual activity to improved psychological and physical results, with these advantages often becoming more evident as people age. However, significant cross-cultural differences have also been seen in this connection, with religious affiliation sometimes seeming to have no effect on well-being outcomes or even to have a negative link. This may be explained by the finding that culture moderates the association between religiosity and wellbeing, which means that research using atheist populations have shown religion to have a reduced predictive value for wellbeing.

Religion may be particularly significant in impacting late-life well-being compared to other life stages because it often directly affects the promotion of a sense of existential significance in life and the formation of strong social bonds, both of which are essential for late-life well-being. The literary foundation for religion's ability to create meaning is strong, and it does so in at least two different ways. First, religious organisations provide its adherents a set of precepts that directly address their existential concerns. Second, being a part of a religious community includes engaging with a group of individuals who have similar existential ideas, creating a feeling of agreement that helps to strengthen the conviction of such beliefs. Reducing anxiety and the likelihood of depression is one of religion's existential benefits to wellbeing. Religious convictions can serve as the foundation for a variety of unusual psychological coping mechanisms (like as prayer) that may improve wellbeing, support pleasant emotions, and encourage the adoption of effective emotion-regulation techniques. Religious participation offers older people a network of social ties that might be useful by offering emotional support and other socially mediated advantages, from a social viewpoint. Given that they are one of the few social institutions that bring people of all ages together, religious organisations may be particularly helpful in the development of these social ties. Members may take on the position of an elder in connections across generations as a result, allowing them to forge intimate social bonds that might endure for decades.

#### **Relationship between Subjective Well-Being, Spirituality, and Religion:**

People with great spiritual and religious participation, or authority, tend to provide a more favourable assessment of their life (Ramsay et al., 2019). One of the most successful ways to keep a favourable opinion of one's life, despite all the potential adverse situations that one may experience, is to feel connected to a greater power, people, and life in general. Involvement in religion and spirituality may also improve a person's life by enhancing their internal and social resources, such as their sense of self-worth and network belonging.

This theory is further supported by the function of religious practises and beliefs, which are often favourably correlated with life happiness. Strongly held convictions about the presence or nonexistence of God may itself have a positive impact and improve a person's well-being by lowering cognitive dissonance. People may feel a condition of psychological strain without subjective assurance, which motivates them to calm down (Kitchens and Phillips, 2018). This may be the fundamental cause of the equal levels of wellbeing reported by religious and nonreligious people when their degree of belief is properly compared, as shown by Galen and Kloet (2011). However, some studies (Mak et al., 2011) found no association between religiosity and life satisfaction, raising doubts about the existence of a direct link between people's beliefs and attitudes toward religion and their own level of happiness in life. Findings on the influence of spirituality and religion on the emotional aspect of SWB are also inconsistent. A probable influence of the social framework given by religious affiliation on feeling pleasant affect was noted by certain research, which revealed a modest association between religiosity/spirituality and happy affect. Particularly, it seems that certain behaviours, like praying, favourably influence the occurrence of pleasant emotions like appreciation (Lambert et al., 2009). The association between religion and wellbeing is also mediated by self-transcendent emotions like awe, hope, love, and forgiveness, according to recent research. Additionally, emotional regulation, which entails modulating emotional states in

response to environmental demands, is a key mechanism that helps explain the connection between religion and wellbeing, according to Ramsay et al. (2019). Religious persons may become acclimated to cognitive reappraisal in the sense that religion continuously educates people to evaluate emotional occurrences. Studies by Vishkin et al. (2016) have recently shown that these theories are true even for those who practise other faiths.

Being more religiously active and spiritually connected may not have a substantial impact on one's experience of good or negative affect, according to other research that failed to find a relationship between these factors and either positive or negative affect.

### **Criticism:**

Different factors, such as personality traits that differentiate between happy and sad personalities, ideals individuals believe are significant and worth pursuing in life, or meeting social requirements, may contribute to an impact how people evaluate the numerous dimensions of their lives.

A increasing corpus of research examines, among other things, how spirituality and religiosity affect people's perceptions of their own well-being. It finds that these factors have a favourable impact on a wide range of psychological and health-related outcomes across the lifetime.

It turns out to be essential to describe how religion and spirituality have been understood in literature given the intricacy of these notions. According to Pargament (1997), religiosity and spirituality refer to a person's values, beliefs, behaviours, and identity and may either be centred on the holy or the practical components of religion. On the one hand, religiosity is often operationalized as beliefs and practises connected with a certain religious worldview and community. It is frequently seen as "the formal, institutional, and outward manifestation" of one's connection with the holy. However, spirituality is operationalized as the human desire for transcendence, introspection, interconnectedness, and the search for meaning in life, which can be experienced in and/or outside of a particular religious context. Spirituality is conceptualised as the search for meaning in life, for a personal connection with transcendent realities, and for interconnectedness with humanity.

### **Conclusion:**

As a conclusion, we may state that mental health practitioners need to acknowledge this problem and include it into their work because of the importance and impact that spirituality and religion have on people's subjective well-being. The findings of this research underline the value of assisting clients in determining their life's purpose and objectives, which is consistent with what the Self-Determination method recommends (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Furthermore, the findings of the current research encourage us to not minimise the beneficial effects that adherence to religion and religious practises also impose on SWB, even while we do not want to downplay the significance that innate religious orientation has for wellbeing. Therefore, psychologists who work in both clinical and non-clinical settings must be honest with their clients in order to be aware of the potential role that spirituality and religion may play as a stressor or a resource and create a successful working relationship.

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