

Towards Well Being: Scaling the association between religiosity and happiness

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Abstract: The relation among religion and happiness can be tricky to define. While both make up part of a person's well-being, belief and trust. Where Happiness refers to an individual's emotions, feelings or moods there the same research found the happiest people tend to be religious and more devotee towards various rituals perform in the society thereafter it is associated with the feeling of contentment. Various threads has been linked with the term happiness to get some meaningful relationships over the years. Therefore, it become interesting to find out some imperative correlation if any exist among the religious activities and happiness. In the present paper we attempt to find out the linkage between these two variables in India with the sample of approximately 4000 individuals that was taken from World Value Survey 6 i.e. 2010-14.

Keywords: Happiness, Religion, well-being, India.

Introduction

What makes people happy? This question can be difficult to answer. Happiness has been strived throughout history. Philosophers, thinkers and activists, such as Aristippus, Aristotle, Zhuangzi, Jean Jacques Rousseau, Jeremy Benthan and Bertrand Russell, have considered happiness to be one of the highest goals human life. Whereas religion is a global cultural phenomenon that has arguably been, and remains, one of the most powerful influences on humanity. Investigation of the factors that enhance happiness is the current focus of happiness research. Religion has been identified as a factor positively related to happiness, however, this link is contentious as research has found conflicting results (Argyle & Hills, 2000; Lewis & Cruise, 2006).

Religion has been identified as one factor that may enhance happiness, as research has found a positive association between religiosity and happiness (Argyle & Hills, 2000; Francis, Jones, & Wilcox, 2000; Francis & Lester, 1997; Francis & Robbins, 2000; French & Joseph, 1999; Lewis, Maltby, & Day, 2005). However, some studies have found no association (Lewis, Lanigan, Joseph, & De Fockert, 1997; Lewis, Maltby, & Burkinshaw, 2000).

In 2008, when-presidential candidate Barack Obama received a lot of hate mail for saying "bitter" voters "cling to guns or religion" in response to hard times. Obama later apologized and reneged. Thankfully, a large number of scientists have entered this hot-button territory. After investigating this idea they found that, "If people are religious, are they more likely to be happy? Does the link between happiness and religiosity change during difficult times? When people are feeling good, are they less likely to commit effort toward religious practice?"

Whereby what you do affects utility and subsequent behaviour – have overwhelmingly been investigated using data on choices (observable behaviours). There are, however, arguably good reasons to complement these behavioural results by the analysis of some measure of utility. This paper takes the latter utility approach to modelling social interactions, but applied to a somewhat unusual phenomenon: religious behaviour. While it seems fairly established across various social science disciplines that the religious report higher levels of well-being than do the non-religious. This paper attempts to fill this gap, asking if the well-being (happiness) premium for the religious activities which further depends on the religious behaviour of those around them.

It is already known that individuals seem to benefit from their own religious involvement: the religious tend to be happier than the non-religious, *ceteris paribus* (e.g. Lelkes 2006). However, we know much less about the consequences of this behaviour on others. It is reported in the literature that people in societies with more difficult living situations (e.g., widespread hunger and low life expectancy) tend to be more religious, and the link between religiousness and well-being was stronger in these societies than in those with less difficulty. Apart from socioeconomic development, Eichhorn (2011) showed that societal level religiosity moderates the link between a person's attitude toward religion (i.e., the importance of God in one's life) and his or her satisfaction with life. Specifically, the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction was found to be stronger in societies with a higher average level of religiousness, suggesting that person-culture fit enhances the contribution of an individual's religiosity to life satisfaction. Thus, these studies generally showed a positive relationship of religion and spirituality with subjective well-being, but that the strength of this relationship would vary as a function of the cultural contexts. Hence, it become essential to carry out the research on this area.

Review of Literature:

Clark et al (2009) concluded that religious behaviour is positively correlated with individual life satisfaction. Average religiosity in the region also has a positive impact; people are more satisfied in religious regions. Going to church and personal prayers have a positive effect on subjective well-being. **Rajeev Dehejia (2007)** concluded that households who contribute to religious organisations are better able to insure happiness against income shocks. Spirituality works as a fuel for success and happiness as concluded by **Mani Kansal (2012)**. Meditation and prayers are positively related with happiness. **Miu Chihun et al (2013)** examined the relationship between spirituality and subjective well-being across national culture. The variables were religious life, religious experience, prayer, closeness to God, frequency of prayer, etc. A positive relationship between religion, spirituality and happiness was, thus, found. **Timmermans (1997)** analysed the relationship of happiness with religion and income for 42 nations, with a sample size of 2500 individuals from India. It was found that income, religion and employment was positively correlated with happiness. The faith in God was found to have positive and statistically significant association with the level of happiness (**Jai Chander, 2004**).

The paper explores the non-material determinants of happiness. We go beyond the well-established result that individual 'religiousness' is positively correlated with happiness.

While the literature suggests that religious people tend to be happier, not all findings suggest that there the link is strictly linear. **Mochon et al. (2010)** point at a more complex relationship between the two variables finding that people with weaker beliefs are actually less happy than those who do not believe at all.

Turning to the link between thinking about the MPL and happiness, the only study looking at the relationship between the two variables is **Haller and Hadler (2006)**. They hypothesise that people who often think about the meaning of life are also more reflexive and should therefore be more satisfied with life. However, they also admit that the thinking about MPL might be explained by high ethicalmoral standards or personal problems. Using World Values Survey data for 1995-1997 (wave 3) covering 41 countries around the world, **Haller and Hadler** find no statistically significant relationship between thinking about the MPL and happiness.

The study of human incentives being at the centre of the economic discipline, religious beliefs form an important object of investigation. Already **Adam Smith (1776)** studied how religious markets should be organized optimally. However, for a long time (up to the mid-seventies of the last century), religion was considered an irrational belief not worth-wile to explain within the rationality framework of economics. Today, a multitude of researchers are investigating religious beliefs and activities and their economic consequences.

Objective:

Hereby, it gives ample evidences present in the history discussed in various threads that study on religious pursuit of people and happiness has important place in one's life. Therefore, present paper aims to find out the association among the religious variables and happiness in India.

Data & Methodology

In the onset paper the data for India has been used for the period 2010-14. The source of the data is World Value Survey. The WVS is a global network of social scientists studying changing values and their impact on social and political life, led by an international team of scholars, with the WVS Association and WWSA Secretariat headquartered in Vienna, Austria.

The survey, which started in 1981, seeks to use the most rigorous, high-quality research designs in each country. The WVS consists of nationally representative surveys conducted in almost 100 countries which contain almost 90 percent of the world's population, using a common questionnaire. The WVS is the largest non-commercial, cross-national, time series investigation of human beliefs and values ever executed, currently including interviews with almost 400,000 respondents. Moreover the WVS is the only academic study covering the full range of global variations, from very poor to very rich countries, in all of the world's major cultural zones.

As both the variables used in the paper depicting the quality of human life, keeping in view to extract the results bi-variate rank correlation (Spearsman) has been run with the help of SPSS software.

Analysis:

Many descriptions and definitions have been applied to religion (Banister, 2011), with belief in a supernatural being or beings often posited as the core feature (Burke, 1996; Norenzayan, 2010). Defining the religious and nonreligious is not necessarily straightforward. Some religious people believe in the existence of a God and also participate in religious practices, such as attending services in a place of worship. On the other hand, other people believe in the existence of a God without belonging to a particular faith or participating in religious services (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). In terms of the nonreligious, an agnostic is defined as someone who is uncertain or undecided about the existence of a God, while an atheist doesn't believe any form of supreme being or universal force exists (Zuckerman, 2009). These four different belief types will be examined in the present study, although other belief types are acknowledged such as a spiritual perspective that may or may not include belief in the existence of a God.

Correlations

Spearman's Rank	Feeling of happiness	Important in life: Religion	How often do you attend religious services	How often to you pray	Religious person
Feeling of happiness	1.000	.140**	.011	.117**	.074**
Correlation Coefficient		.000	.494	.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)		.000		.000	.000
N	4064	4009	3902	3986	3941
Important in life: Religion		1.000	.096**	.188**	.189**
Correlation Coefficient			.000	.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)			.000	.000	.000
N		4019	3870	3947	3901
How often do you attend religious services			1.000	.503**	.121**
Correlation Coefficient				.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000
N			3915	3901	3807
How often to you pray				1.000	.193**
Correlation Coefficient					.000
Sig. (2-tailed)					.000
N				4000	3887
Religious person					1.000
Correlation Coefficient					
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N					3952

In the present paper while comparing Religious variables i.e. Important in life: Religion, How often do you attend religious services, How often to you pray, Religious person with the feeling of happiness we found significant results. Feeling of happiness is positively correlated with important of religion in one's in life, how often do you pray and religious person that is highly significant at $p < .01$. Seeing the results one can conclude that religious activities play a vital role in attaining happiness, people in large depend on their belief and trust factors and try to locate happiness while praying to God or by performing certain activities according to their beliefs. This also portrays the role of spiritual aspects of the people which has a centre place in today's material world. Apart of living in the materialistic society which is full of consumerism people try to find out happiness in other domain like religious practices.

As it is rightly said, interest in well-being research has surged – with economists such as Nobel laureate Joseph Stiglitz agreeing it is time to shift the emphasis from measuring economic production, to measuring people's happiness and life satisfaction.

Conclusion:

In the present study we found significant association among religiosity and happiness. The results found that people tend to divert their attention towards religious activities to get happiness in the mad rush of materialistic society. The findings are important as they suggest the religious are happier, that is, religion adds to a person's happiness. Future directions for research on happiness should explore other intentional activities that may boost happiness, including social support. But to make human happiness the overall guide to human progress requires good data on the quality of human lives and this is something that is sadly still lagging in most countries.

Future research could be taken by taking self-reported, self-esteem measures and non-religious group in combination with an experimental design. Research on behavioural measures, periodic assessments of happiness by participants, and peer ratings could also be carried out. As longitudinal studies could provide information regarding causation and significant changes in happiness across developmental stages, this could also be the part of future research.

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