

The Pattern of Association of Religious Factors with Subjective Well-Being: A Path Analysis Model

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The present study was an effort to explore the nature and pattern of relationship of certain religious aspects, viz., religious beliefs, religious practices, and spirituality with subjective well being. The sample of the study consist 350 subjects and the tools used were: i. Religious Beliefs Scale, ii. Religious Practices Questionnaire, iii. Spirituality Scale, and iv. Subjective Well being Inventory. Statistical techniques such as correlation and path analysis were used for the analysis of data. The results reveal that all the three factors of religious beliefs, religious practices, and spirituality have significant positive correlations with subjective well being. Path analysis yielded a path model and also gave the estimates of the direct, indirect, and total effects of religious beliefs, practices, and spirituality on subjective well being. Spirituality has largest overall effect on subjective well being and the effect of religious beliefs could be interpreted meaningfully considering the intervening variables, i.e., religious practices and spirituality.

Keywords: Subjective Well-being, Path Analysis

Subjective well being is generally considered to be an important aspect in the lives of the people in the modern democratic world. As people in the world come to meet their biological needs, they become increasingly concerned with happiness and fulfilment. In an international survey Diener (2000) found that life satisfaction and happiness were rated as extremely important. Satisfaction in life is generally recognized to be an important component in determining mental health (Granick,1975).

Subjective well-being represents people's evaluations of their lives, and includes happiness, pleasant emotions, life satisfaction, and a relative absence of unpleasant moods and emotions. A person's evaluation of his or her life is gauged by the cognitive and emotional reactions (Diener & Biswas-Diener, 2000). Recently there is a

marked increase in the number of scientific works on subjective well being and related aspects. One of the areas of recent development in subjective well-being research is to understand the cultural dimensions, particularly religion, that moderate the variables which influence subjective well-being.

Religion has had great influence on the lives of human beings for thousands of years and it is found in all known human societies. Most religions provide their members a set of precepts or norms to guide their behaviour (Smelser, 1981). In eastern countries like India, religious activities are generally found as an intimate part of the life of the local community.

Every religion is supported by a recognizable formal system of beliefs. Religious beliefs can be defined as a strong

and steady conception of the ideas of religion. Believing in religion is related to an individual's thoughts, feelings, communion, and subsequent value system that developed as a result of his or her consideration of things divine (Wald & Smidt, 1993). Religion also involves a specific set of practices which include all kinds of religious behaviours. The practices associated with religion vary from culture to culture. They include praying, chanting, singing, meditating, visiting the places of worship, reading scriptures, eating certain kinds of foods or refraining from doing so, fasting on certain days, and so on. Prayer is one of the most important religious practices. In prayer a sense of the presence of, and communication with God is felt (Thouless, 1956).

Spirituality refers to concepts that are much harder to define and measure, such as personal views and behaviours that express a sense of relatedness to the transcendental dimension or something greater than the self (Reed, 1987). Spirituality is the spirit of religion. All formal religious scriptures refer to spiritual domain. Conventional religious scriptures refer to participation in organized religious practices demonstrates aspects of spirituality (Geldard & Geldard, 1999). Spirituality is often demonstrated in a more fundamental way through the search for meaning in life's daily experiences.

Recently there is a growing interest among psychologists on the relationship of religious factors with various dimensions of subjective well being. Byrd, Hageman, and Isle (2007) conducted a study to determine if the frequently reported positive association between intrinsic religious motivation and subjective well-being is explicable in terms of a more general intrinsic orientation to life. In their study intrinsic religiousness emerged as an independent predictor of satisfaction with life. Daaleman and Frey (2004) demonstrated that spirituality index of well-being had high

positive correlation with general well-being and an inverse negative correlation with depression.

Krause (2003) examined the relationship between religious meaning and subjective well-being. The findings suggest that older adults who derive a sense of meaning in life from religion tend to have higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and optimism. Barkan and Greenwood (2003) observed that religious attendance is positively associated with subjective well-being among adults aged 65 and older. Ellison et al. (2001) found that church attendance had a consistent beneficial effect even with controls for a wide range of sociodemographic and psychosocial covariates. A study conducted by Fry (2000) revealed that personal meaning, involvement in formal religion, participation in spiritual practices, importance of religion, sense of inner peace with self, and accessibility to religious resources were significant predictors of well-being. MacKenzie et al. (2000) revealed that many expressed the belief that having a relationship with God forms the foundation of their psychological well-being. Brady et al. (1999) found that religiousness buffered the relationship between physical well-being and overall quality of life. Francis, Robbins, and White (2003) reported a positive correlation between the scores of Oxford Happiness Inventory and the Francis Scale of Attitude Towards Christianity. Mountain and Muir (2002) showed that existential well-being of the sample was positively correlated to religious beliefs and to religious practices.

Harker (2001) conducted a longitudinal study to examine the link between immigrant generation and adolescent psychological well-being. He found that religious practices and family influences serve as a protective factor that enable first generation immigrants to maintain their higher levels of well-being. Suhail and Chaudhry (2004) reported that Eastern people are as happy and satisfied

as people from many Western countries and religious affiliation was found to be a predictor of subjective well-being. In the present study subjective well being was studied in connection with three important aspects of religion, i.e., religious beliefs, practices, and spirituality.

Objective

The objective of the study is to find the association of subjective well being with certain aspects of religion such as religious beliefs, religious practices, and spirituality. It also attempts to identify a path model and to estimate the direct, indirect, and total effects in a systematic way.

Hypotheses

- i. Religious beliefs, religious practices and spirituality will correlate positively and significantly with subjective well being.
- ii. The path analysis will yield a path model and the estimates of effects, which can explain the pattern of association of religious factors with subjective well being.

Method

Participants

The 350 persons were selected from different parts of Kerala State. People affiliated to the three major religions, namely., Hindu, Christian, and Islam participated in the study. Both males and females belonging to different socioeconomic status and locale were in the sample.

Materials

(i). Religious Beliefs Scale: Sreekumar & Sananda Raj, (2002a) have designed to assess the religious beliefs of people affiliated to Hindu, Christian, and Islam religions. If closely observed, many features of beliefs of these religions are common. The scale contains 28 items, with equal number of positive and negative items, and they are measured on a Likert five point scale. The scale focuses on various aspects of the belief

systems of Hindu, Christian and Islam religions.

(ii). Religious Practices Questionnaire: Sreekumar & Sananda Raj, (2002b) have designed to measure the extend of religious practices of Hindus, Christians, and Muslims. The questionnaire assesses the involvement of the subjects in various religious practices such as, prayer, worship, visiting the places of worship, reading sacred scriptures, participating in religious ceremonies. There are 12 items in the scale and which are measured on a three point scale.

(iii). Spirituality Scale: Spirituality refers to the personal, subjective side of religious experience. Spirituality includes a broad focus on the immaterial features of life that are used to understand material life. The present Spirituality Scale (Sreekumar & Sananda Raj, 2002c) was designed to measure the spirituality of people belonging to Hindu, Christian, and Islam religions. The scale contains 26 items, including both positive and negative items, and the measurement is on a Likert five-point scale.

(iv). Subjective Well -Being Inventory: It was developed by Suhani and Sananda Raj (2001). It is a modified version of Sell & Nagpal's (1992) Subjective Well-Being Inventory and it consists of 25 items. The inventory consists of 10 factors which were generally divided into two categories; positive and negative congruence.

Results

Carl Pearson product moment correlation was performed to find out the nature and extend of relationship of subjective well being with the three religious factors under study, viz., religious beliefs, religious practices, and spirituality. The resulted obtained in the analyses are presented in the table given in Table 1:

Table 1. Correlations of Religious Factors with Subjective Well being

Religious Factors	Subjective well being
Religious Beliefs	0.388*
Religious Practices	0.403*
Spirituality	0.498*

*P<0.01

The results shown in Table I indicate that all the three religion related variables correlated significantly and positively with subjective well being. Coefficient of correlation between religious beliefs and subjective well being was 0.388, $p < 0.01$. The r between religious practices and subjective well being was 0.403, $p < 0.01$. Again the correlation between spirituality and subjective well being was 0.498, $p < 0.01$. All these correlations reveal that people with higher levels of religious beliefs, practices and spirituality are more likely to experience greater subjective well being. The aim of the path analysis was to make quantitative estimates of casual connections between the four variables under study, viz., religious beliefs, religious practices, spirituality, and subjective well being. The connections proceeds in one direction and are viewed as making distinct paths. These ideas can be best explained with reference to the central feature of a path analysis, i.e., the path diagram.

In order to provide estimates of each of the postulated paths, path coefficients were calculated. A path coefficient is a standardized regression coefficient. The path coefficients were computed by setting up three *structural equations*, that is equations which stipulate the structure of hypothesized relationships in a model. Here, three structural equations were formed - one for subjective well being, one for spirituality, and one for religious practices. The three equations are presented below:

$$1). \text{ Subjective well being} = X_1 \text{religious beliefs} + X_2 \text{religious practices} + X_3 \text{spirituality} + e_1$$

$$2). \text{ Spirituality} = X_1 \text{religious beliefs} + X_2 \text{religious practices} + e_2$$

$$3). \text{ Religious practices} = X_1 \text{religious beliefs} + e_3$$

The constants are not represented here.

The path coefficients were computed using multiple regression analyses for each of these equations with stepwise method. For the first equation, the path coefficients (standardized regression coefficients) for religious beliefs, religious practices and spirituality were -0.006 , 0.210 , and 0.398 respectively. And the error term (e) was estimated to be 0.848 . In the case of the second equation the path coefficients for religious beliefs and religious practices were 0.556 and 0.123 respectively, and the error term is 0.764 . For the last equation, the path coefficient for religious beliefs was identified to be 0.667 , here the error term was 0.746 .

On the basis of the obtained path coefficients, a path diagram was developed and which is presented in Figure I.

The next step is to calculate the overall impact of religious beliefs and religious practices on subjective well being. This could be estimated by adding the direct effect of religious beliefs and practices with their indirect effects. The direct, indirect and total effects of religious beliefs, religious practices, and spirituality on subjective well being are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. The Effects of Religious Factors on Subjective Well being

Effects	Direct	Indirect	Total
Religious beliefs	-0.006	0.394	0.388
Religious practices	0.210	0.049	0.259
Spirituality	0.398	0.000	0.398

Comparing these three overall effects we can see spirituality had the largest overall effect on subjective well being. The above results suggest that the indirect effect of religious beliefs on subjective well being is inconsistent with its direct effect, because the direct effect is slightly negative and indirect effect is positive. Obviously, an appreciation of the intervening variables. viz., religious practices and spirituality is essential to an understanding of the relationship between religious beliefs and subjective well being.

Discussion

The results obtained in the study indicate that religious beliefs, practices and spirituality are positively associated with subjective well being. Religion is fundamentally concerned with articulating meanings of human experience (Kazdin, 2000). Religious beliefs may provide a sense of well-being through guidance, a sense of right and wrong and a connection to God. Moreover, belief in God helps people in relieving their tensions. Pargament (1997) noted religion as a search for significance in ways that are related to sacred. So a believer may interpret the self and the universe in the light of his or her

religious beliefs and that may help to experience greater level of subjective well being.

Many people get religious support from their involvement in various religious practices and some have referred this kind of religious support as sacred experience (Emmons, 1999). People often derive emotional support from their religious practices. Fiala, Bjorck, & Gorsuch (2002) have reported that religious support has been associated with lower levels of depression and more positive affect or life satisfaction. The results of the present study are in agreements with these studies.

Spirituality attributes non-physical dimensions to our existence. Moreover, the emotional content of the spiritual responses—feelings of connection, significance, serenity, and acceptance – may provide greater subjective well-being to the individual. Moreover within a spiritual perspective, many aspects of life can be perceived as sacred in significance and character, and the sense of sacredness may represent an important source of happiness, life satisfaction, and subjective well-being. Levin et al. (1999) also found a positive association between spirituality and quality of life.

Path analysis identified spirituality as the major predictor of subjective well being. The direct effect of religious belief on subjective well being is slightly negative but its indirect effect through spirituality is positive. It suggests that religious beliefs alone, with out having underlying spirituality, may have a negative impact on well being. A person with blind belief in religious dogmas with out being aware of their meaning and significance may experience guilt, distress and other psychological disturbances. Involvement in religious practices may provide effective coping strategies and also facilitate spiritual growth and well being.

Conclusion

Religious beliefs, practices, and spirituality have significant positive correlation with subjective well being. Path analysis reveals that the spirituality has the largest overall effect on subjective well being. The direct effect of religious beliefs on subjective well being is slightly negative but the indirect effect is positive. Both the direct and indirect effects of religious practices on subjective well being are positive. An appreciation of the intervening variables, viz., religious practices and spirituality is essential to an understanding of the relationship between religious beliefs and subjective well being.

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