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Social and Religious Factors on Subjective Well-being

Eric J. Uhl¹⁵

Religion as it pertains to subjective well-being is a topic of debate as religion operationalized can undertake many forms. However, research has shown that religion is a form of social interaction and an inclusionary social institution. It is also noted in previous subjective well-being research that social support has a positive correlation with the condition of subjects. Thus, the facet of religion that could be the best measure in regard to subjective well-being is social support provided by religious institutions. In the interest of finding a better measure for religion, the use of a comprehensive survey asked respondents to report their degree of religious importance, social support as provided by a religious affiliation, social support in a general manner, and their subjective well-being. This present study was in search of the possible correlation of social support and religious social support as it pertains to subjective well-being.

Religion and well-being have been topics of psychological research that have been, on numerous occasions, tested for a correlation. Witter, Stock, Okun, and Haring (1985) operationalized religion in terms of religiosity and religious activity and found that religion accounted for two to six percent of subjective well-being in adult respondents. The authors noted the complex construct of religion as a variable and how the correlation could be better measured with more than two variables. Similarly, a study by Barkan and Greenwood (2003) indicated that religious attendance is positively correlated with subjective well-being among adults age 65 and older. Again, the correlation between religion and subjective well-being was measured in aspects that only relate to the practice of performing a religion.

In another study, researchers found a correlation between subjective well-being and religion; however, the religious variable accounted for aspects of religious altruism and practice (Tiliouine, Cummins, & Davern, 2009). The results revealed that only religious altruism

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remained significant in relation to subjective well-being, while the significance of religious practice diminished. Tiliounie et al. (2009) used different operational definitions of religion and yet the results were significant in relation to subjective well-being. It is understood that most religions include a social element. Following the mention of different aspect of religion in the previous studies it could be possible that subjective well-being is indirectly influenced by religion and social assimilation associated with religious affiliation is the direct cause of the correlation. There is a small body of research that shows promising results in relation to the above claim.

A study by Ellison (1991), confirmed that there was an influence of religious variables on subjective well-being. Most relevant to this body of research was the finding that the religious (i.e. devotion, importance, etc.) of religion contribute to well-being indirectly (Ellison, 1991). Following this finding, the researchers speculated that correlations found in previous research assumed that the religious attendance and private devotion were not directly linked to an individual's well-being. Ellison's suggestion of an outside cause addresses this critique of the correlation and presents a new direction of religion and well-being research. Doane, Elliot, and Dyrenforth (2014) attempted to test the motivation for becoming involved in religion (extrinsic, intrinsic), well-being, and perceived social support. Researchers found that individuals that join religion for extrinsic reasons (social benefits) perceive lower levels of social support, which negatively affects religious orientation and well-being, as opposed to individuals joining a religious organization for intrinsic reasons (gaining comfort and protection from personal troubles) (Doane et al., 2014).

Building on previous research and broadening the scope of the variables I hoped to examine the overall correlation between religion, subjective well-being, religious social support and social support. I hypothesized that: (a) social support and subjective well-being will have a

positive relationship, (b) religious importance and well-being will be positively correlated, and (c) religious social support and subjective well-being will also be positively correlated.

Method

Participants

I recruited 232 participants to take my survey. In order to preserve accuracy, incomplete surveys were removed from the final analysis, only 100 participants' responses were included for data analysis, 66 of which identified as Female. The median age of participants was 22.0 years, and the average age of participants was 31.0 years. Participants consisted of persons connected with me on social media as well as subjects recruited through Psi Chi website. The survey was posted on my social media pages: Facebook and Instagram. The survey link posted on these social media pages was accompanied by the following quote: "Please consider taking my anonymous survey. It's part of my research project for my independent research class at Lindenwood University. Your participation is completely voluntary. Thank you!".

Materials

Nine different measurements were adapted and included in the present study, making the survey a total of 71 questions in length. Variables of interest included the degree of religious importance in the participant's life, religious social support, social support, and subjective well-being. The survey also included demographic questions that asked participants to report their age and their gender. Three surveys are used to measure participant's degree of religious importance and the participants' level of social support provided by religion.

Survey

Religion and Religious Social Support. The religious block of the survey contains 35 questions that gathered appropriate data to measure religious importance and social support (see Appendix C). The inventories, Religiosity Measure by Aalsma et al. (2013) and Attachment to Religion Scale by Alvarez-Rivera, Lorna, and Fox (2010), are used to measure the participants' level of religious importance. A sample question measuring religious importance would ask a participant to rate the following question from one to ten, one being the least important and ten being the most important, as it applies to their life, "I rely on my religious beliefs as a guide for day-today living" (Aalsma et al., 2013). The survey Religious Support Scale – Adapted (Montgomery et al., 2016), has also been implemented in this survey to measure participants level of social support provide by religion. An example of a question measuring religious social support would ask a participant to rate the following question one to ten as it applies to their life, one being the least applicable and ten being the most applicable: "I can turn to members of a congregation for advice when I have problems" (Montgomery et al., 2016).

Social Support. There are 27 questions utilized to measure participants' level of social support in the present study (see Appendix C). Measuring social support of participants takes place with three different surveys that have been adapted to this study's instrument: (1) Social Support Measure by Emerson, Kariuki, Honey, and Llewellyn (2014), (2) Social Success Scale by Greve, Thomsen, and Dehio (2014), and (3) Social Success Measure by Pea et al. (2012). Questions regarding social support ask participants to rate statements one to ten as it applies to life, one being the least applicable and ten being the most applicable, for example, "I feel like I have a lot of friends" (Emerson et al., 2014).

Subjective well-being. Finally, seven questions used to measure a participant's subjective well-being were gathered and adapted from three scales to the degree of subjective

well-being (see Appendix C). Using the Subjective Psychological Well-Being Indexes by Bryant and Veroff (1982), Well-Being Composite Measure by Greenaway et al. (2015), and Subjective Well-Being--Short Scale by Røysamb, Harris, Magnus, Vittersø, & Tambs (2002) participants rate questions as they apply to their life in regard to the subjective well-being. For example, a question asks participants to rate from one to ten (one being tired and worn out - ten being strong and fit), "Do you mostly feel tired and worn out or strong and fit" (Bryant, & Veroff, 1982).

Procedure

After clicking the link to the study participants were prompted to start the survey. The survey started by confirming the participant was above the age of 18; or if the participant answered that they were under the age of 18 the survey would end. If the participant indicated, they were 18 years of age they were then prompted to read the Informed Consent/Information/Cover Letter for the survey and asked if they wish to participate (see Appendix A). Participants who chose the "I choose not participate" option will be taken to the end the survey immediately; all others will proceed to complete the study. At the end of the survey participants were thanked for their participation and given contact information and provided with more information regarding the study (see Appendix B).

Results

To test the hypothesis that social support and subjective well-being are positively correlated, a correlational analysis was completed. The results revealed a moderate positive correlation between subjective well-being and social support $r(100) = .36, p < .05$. To test the hypothesis that religious importance and subjective well-being are positively correlated, a Pearson's r correlational analysis was conducted. The results revealed a statistically significant weak positive correlation between subjective well-being and religious importance $r(100) = .28, p < .05$. Finally, to test the hypothesis that religious social support and subjective well-

being are indicated are positively correlated, a Pearson's r correlational analysis was conducted. The results of the Pearson's r revealed that a moderately strong correlation exists between religious social support and subjective well-being $r(100) = .38, p < .05$.

Discussion

All three hypotheses were supported the findings in this study, as well as by previous research. In support of the hypotheses, the results pertaining to social support and well-being show that people who have a social support system that they can utilize have a higher subjective well-being. Previous research supports the findings of a relationship between the variable religious social support and its relation to subjective well-being (Ellison, 1991). The correlation was comparable to that of social support and subjective well-being, which raises the question, what role does the variable of religion play in the correlation to subjective well-being? As this study insinuates, religious importance plays less of a role than social support or religious social support. The topic of religious provided well-being has been a frequent talking due to the multiplicity of sub-facets of religion. These finding could lead to the reduction of the facets or study of religion as it associates with well-being altogether, due to its inadequacy of effect when compared to social support. While religion does in fact provide a level of social support, the community that is surrounding the institution seems to be the actual condition that affect well-being. While this is unclear in this correlational research the possibility is there and could be use in later research to discover if well-being is related to just religious importance or the social aspect of religion.

While this study provides promising results, it should be noted that the study was correlational and could provide better results regarding the role of each variable using further testing methods. The participation in this study was quite high, however, due to the number of respondents who only gave partial responses, I remove numerous responses from the final result.

In reference to the frequency of partial responses, the length of the survey was likely an issue, though there weren't any obvious stopping points, the amount of questions participants had to answer could have been narrowed down to the most critical questions.

In conclusion, this study suggests that religious importance in testing subjective well-being is not that crucial when compared to religious provided social support or social support in general. In future research when testing for subjective well-being, religious importance as a variable could be better measured through the social support it offers rather than the numerous ideological and categorical facets previous research provides.

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Appendix A

Informed Consent/Information/Cover Letter for Survey

(This will be included as the first item on the survey itself.)

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Eric Uhl for a class project in the Department of Psychology at Lindenwood University, under the guidance of Dr. Nohara-LeClair. The purpose of this research is to examine whether there are interrelationships between religion, subjective well-being, and social support.
2. Your participation will involve completing this anonymous online survey. The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately five minutes.
3. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. You will receive extra credit simply by virtue of completing this informed consent; you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Participants will receive no compensation beyond the possible benefits listed above. However, your participation is an opportunity to contribute to psychological science.
4. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.
5. Your responses will be anonymous. No information that identifies you personally will be collected, not even your IP address. The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only. All data will be kept securely, in accord with the standards of the University, Federal regulations, and the American Psychological Association.
6. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may call the Investigator, Eric Uhl, at 814-389-6430 or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Nohara-LeClair, at (636)-949-4371. You may also ask questions or state concerns regarding your participation in the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Lindenwood's Provost, Dr. Marilyn Abbott at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Choosing to participate indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are at least 18 years of age.

Appendix B

Thank You Statement

(This will be the final item on the survey itself.)

Thank You Statement

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey for my class project at Lindenwood University. I hypothesize that religious and social factors will be correlated with subjective well-being.

If you would like to see the results of my survey after December 4, 2017, please feel free to contact me using the contact information below. Again, thank you very much for your time and effort!

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Faculty Supervisor
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Appendix C

Social and Religious Factors on Subjective Well-Being

Start of Block: Intro

Q1 Are you are at least 18 years of age?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If Are you are at least 18 years of age? = No

Skip To: Q2 If Are you are at least 18 years of age? = Yes

Q2

1. You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Eric Uhl for a class project in the Department of Psychology at Lindenwood University, under the guidance of Dr. Nohara-LeClair. The purpose of this research is to examine whether there is are interrelationships between religion, subjective well-being, and social support.

2. Your participation will involve completing this anonymous online survey. The amount of time involved in your participation will be approximately 12 minutes.

3. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study. You will receive extra credit simply by virtue of completing this informed consent; you are free to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. Participants will receive no compensation beyond the possible benefits listed above. However, your participation is an opportunity to contribute to psychological science.

4. Your participation is voluntary and you may choose not to participate in this research study or to withdraw your consent at any time. You may choose not to answer any questions that you do not want to answer. You will NOT be penalized in any way should you choose not to participate or to withdraw.

5. Your responses will be anonymous. No information that identifies you personally will be collected, not even your IP address. The primary investigator will not be able to identify your answers as belonging to you; data will be examined at the group level only. All data will be kept securely, in accord with the standards of the University, Federal regulations, and the American Psychological Association.

6. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study, you may call the Investigator, Eric Uhl, at 814-389-6430 or the Supervising Faculty, Dr. Nohara-LeClair, at (636)-949-4371. You

may also ask questions of or state concerns regarding your participation in the Lindenwood Institutional Review Board (IRB) through contacting Lindenwood’s Provost, Dr. Marilyn Abbott at mabbott@lindenwood.edu or 636-949-4912.

Q3

ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below.

Choosing to participate indicates that:

- You have read the above information.
- You voluntarily agree to participate.
- You are at least 18 years of age.

- I choose to participate (1)
- I choose not to participate (2)

Skip To: End of Survey If ELECTRONIC CONSENT: Please select your choice below. Choosing to participate indicates that: •... = I choose not to participate

End of Block: Intro

Start of Block: Default Question Block



Q4 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	Does NOT AT ALL apply to me.					COMPLETELY APPLIES to me.				
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10	
I believe in a Higher Power. (1)										
I rely on my religious beliefs as a guide for day-to-day living. (2)										
I rely on my religious teaching when I have problem. (3)										
I am able to pray when I have personal problem. (4)										

Q5 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	Does NOT AT ALL apply to me.			COMPLETELY APPLIES to me.					
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
My religion is important to me. (1)									
I attend regular religious meetings/masses/gatherings. (2)									
I attend special religious holidays. (3)									
I am involved in religious activities. (4)									
I follow the principles of my religion. (5)									
The pastor/minister/other is my friend. (6)									
If I have a problem I can turn to the my religious institution for support. (7)									
I go to church when I have problems. (8)									
I go to the church for guidance. (9)									
I don't feel judged at church. (10)									
I do not feel out of place at church. (11)									
After I go to church I feel better about myself. (12)									

Q6 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	Does NOT AT ALL apply to me.					COMPLETELY APPLIES to me.			
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
I can turn to members of a congregation for advice when I have problems. (1)									
Members of a congregation care about my life and situation. (2)									
I do not feel close to members of a congregation. (3)									
Members of a congregation give me the sense that I belong. (4)									
I feel appreciated by members of a congregation. (5)									
If something went wrong, members of a congregation would give me assistance. (6)									
I have worth in the eyes of members of a congregation. (7)									
If something went wrong, church leaders would give me assistance. (8)									
I have worth in the eyes of church leaders. (9)									
I can turn to church leadership for advice when I have problems. (10)									
Church leaders care about my life and situation. (11)									
I do not feel close to church leaders. (12)									
Church leaders give me the sense that I belong. (13)									
I feel appreciated by church leaders. (14)									

Q7 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	Does NOT AT ALL apply to me.					COMPLETELY APPLIES to me.			
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
God gives me the sense that I belong. (1)									
I feel appreciated by God. (2)									
If something went wrong, God would give me assistance. (3)									
I have worth in the eyes of God. (4)									
I can turn to God for advice when I have problems. (5)									
God cares about my life and situation. (6)									
I do not feel close to God. (7)									

Q8 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
I feel like I have a lot of friends. (1)									
People my age understand me. (2)									
I feel like I have a lot of close friends. (3)									
I find it easy to make friends. (4)									
I find it easy to keep friends. (5)									
I feel like I'm important to my friends. (6)									
I feel accepted by people my age. (7)									

Q9 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	Does NOT AT ALL apply to me.					COMPLETELY APPLIES to me.			
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
In conversations with others I usually find the right words. (1)									
Friends come to ask me for advice. (2)									
From time to time I get involved in conflicts because other people want something else than I want. (3)									
If something goes wrong, I have friends by my side that support me. (4)									
From time to time I feel that people do not respect me. (5)									
People in my surrounding appreciate me. (6)									
Sometimes I miss the contact with other people. (7)									
People in my surrounding feel sympathy for the things affecting me. (8)									
My work is appreciated by others. (9)									
I can present myself well in company of others. (10)									

Q10 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

	Does NOT AT ALL apply to me.					COMPLETELY APPLIES to me.			
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
People don't come to visit me as often as I would like. (1)									
I seem to have a lot of friends. (2)									
I often need help from other people but can't get it. (3)									
When I need someone to help me out, I can usually find someone. (4)									
I don't have anyone that I can confide in. (5)									
When something is on my mind, just talking with the people I know can make me feel better. (6)									
I have no one to lean on in times of trouble. (7)									
There is someone who can always cheer me up when I am down. (8)									
I often feel very lonely. (9)									
I enjoy the time I spend with the people who are important to me. (10)									

Q11 Rate these statements as they apply to your life.

	Dissatisfied					Satisfied			
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8	9	10
When you think about life at present, would you say that you are mostly satisfied with my life or mostly dissatisfied with life? (1 being mostly dissatisfied; 10 being mostly satisfied) (1)									

Q27 Rate these statements as they apply to your life.

Never Extremely Often

1 2 3 4 5 7 8 9 10

Over the last month, have you suffered from nervousness (felt irritable, anxious, tense, or restless)? (1)	
--	--

Q26 Rate these statements as they apply to your life.

Tired and Worn Out Strong and Fit

1 2 3 4 5 7 8 9 10

Do you mostly feel tired and worn out or strong and fit? (1)	
--	--

Q24 Rate these statements as they apply to your life.

Dejected Happy

1 2 3 4 5 7 8 9 10

Would you say that you are usually dejected or happy? (1)	
---	--

Q12 Rate how these statements apply to your life 1 - 10. (10 being the highest level of application and 1 being the lowest level of application).

1 2 3 4 5 7 8 9 10

All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life these days? (1 being dissatisfied; 10 being satisfied) (1)	
Taking all things together would you say you are happy? (1 being unhappy; 10 being happy) (2)	
All in all, how would you describe your state of health these days? (1 being unhealthy; 10 being extremely healthy) (3)	

End of Block: Default Question Block

Start of Block: Demographic

Q13 How do you currently describe your gender identity?

- Man, Male, or Masculine (1)
- Transgender Man, Male, or Masculine (2)
- Transgender Woman, Female or Feminine (3)
- Woman, Female, or Feminine (4)
- Gender Nonconforming, Gender Queer, or Gender Questioning (5)
- Intersex, Disorder of Sex Development, Two-Spirited or related terms (6)
- No Response (7)
- Prefer Not to Answer (8)

Q16 What is your age in years?
