

# Religious people aren't generally more satisfied with life than anyone else

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Religious people do not generally have better life satisfaction than atheist and non-religious people, according to research by the University of Cologne.

The study, conducted by Katharina Pohls, Thomas Schlosser, and Detlef Fetchenhauer, examined the relationship between religion and life satisfaction in a cultural comparison across 24 countries.

Using data from the World Values Survey, the researchers compared the life satisfaction of people who self-identified as either highly religious, weakly religious, not religious, or specifically atheist, and who lived in countries with different levels of average religiosity and standard of living.

The findings revealed that when taking the influence of these country characteristics into account, there were no significant differences between indistinct non-religious and highly religious individuals' or between atheist and highly religious individuals' level of life satisfaction – which contrasts common belief. Weakly religious individuals, however, were significantly less satisfied with life than highly religious individuals.

“Previous research has predominantly found evidence for a universal and linear relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction, which has led to the conclusion that highly religious people are more satisfied with life than non-religious people” says Katharina Pöhls.

The reason for this belief is previous studies were mainly focused on US American samples, without taking the influence of differences between countries into consideration, as well as not differentiating between (non)religious subgroups.

The researchers also found that atheist individuals' life satisfaction increased significantly when they lived in countries with many other individuals who identified as either indistinct non-religious or atheist.

This could be due to atheist individuals being discriminated in more religious societies – simply using the label atheist may be perceived as an expression of blasphemy and provocation, which may lead to social exclusion.

“The impact of religion on life satisfaction depends on multiple factors, amongst others, the type of (non)religious subgroup to which an individual belongs, the country's social norm of religiosity, and the societal level of development,” says Katharina Pöhls.

The study was published in the Journal of Happiness Studies.

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