

Why Religion Promotes Happiness

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Abstract This article examines the relationship between happiness and religious beliefs. According to various authors, there is a direct link between the happiness status of a person and his or her beliefs. However, there are those who oppose this notion, claiming that there is no direct link between happiness and religious beliefs. This paper works with the basic assumption that there is a positive link between happiness and religion and examines various viewpoints that support this assumption. Various religions in the world have some sort of belief about happiness and there have been numerous studies that conclude that people who are religious are happier than those people who are not. Moreover, religion promotes a certain lifestyle that has been associated with happiness in people. While of the other hand, people with no religious affiliations tend to be less happy because of their bad lifestyle life drug abuse. This article generalizes that there is a positive relationship between religious beliefs and happiness since these beliefs influence good lifestyle among religious people.

Keyword :- *Happiness. Religious beliefs. Religion. Affiliations*

Happiness is a state of emotional and mental well-being; happiness may involve positive and pleasant emotions like extreme joy and contentment (Ferguson, 2002). A happy mental state can influence a person reflection and judgement about their overall wellbeing("The three types of happiness (article)", 2016). There are many approaches towards happiness; religious, biological, philosophical, economic and psychological. Various scientific methods have been employed to answer questions about happiness and how it can be achieved(Weisbach, n.d.). Twentieth March is the international happiness day declared by the United Nations in its effort to prove that happiness is a universal goal that needs to be recognised ("International Day of Happiness20 March," n.d.). Religious thinkers and philosophers define happiness being more than just simple emotions like joy; these thinkers see happiness regarding quality of life or health. Happiness is a complex term that can mean very many things to different people (Brüde, 2010). This paper seeks to find out how religious beliefs influence happiness in people.

Religion and happiness have attracted many research studies over time; religion structures seeks to address the components contributing to happiness (Chittister, 2011). Religion association with happiness is usually facilitated by the social nature of religion; religious beliefs and the psychological benefits normally associated with prayer (Francis and Lester, 1997).

Religion can make a person happier through various mechanisms which may include socialization and support that one may receive in their effort to become more religious(Lafitte and Ribush, 2002); religion also encourages people to have a positive attitude and the religious activities that people may be involved in, have a positive impact on the religious people(Mandeville, 1720). Religious people understand psychological factors that have an impact on happiness, and this helps them deal with stress effectively (Lewis and Cruise, 2006). Religious belief has an influence on people's behaviour and lifestyle; religious people usually avoid habits that may affect their lives like substance abuse (More and Gwatkin, 1796). These beliefs in turn have a positive impact on the emotional and mental state of the religious people since substance abuse has been associated with depression and poor health (Levin, 2013). Koenig in his book *Handbook of Religion and Health* examines the happiness state of Americans who had abandoned their religious beliefs; in this survey, it found out that there was little relationship between unhappiness and abandoning of religious beliefs (Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). In 1993, Koenig book was cited by Lachman and Kosmin in their survey which came to a generalization that people who have no religious affiliations are more likely to suffer from depressions than those with religious beliefs (Kosmin & Lachman, 1993). It can be generalized that people who are more religious are likely to be happier than those who are not associated with any religious beliefs (Popova, n.d.).

Legatum Prosperity Index has had repeated research findings that confirm that there is a positive link between wellbeing and religious beliefs and affiliations; people who confess that God plays an important role in their lives on average are more satisfied and content with their lives ("The 2015 Legatum Prosperity Index", 2016). This is despite their amount of income or age; the character of these people seem to play an important role in their happiness (Ridington and Ridington, 2013). This index affirms the fact that religious people tend to be happier than those without any religious affiliations.

It was concluded from surveys conducted by the Pew Organization and the National Research Centre that people who are very religious are twice likely to confirm that they are very happy with their lives than those people who lack any religious commitment ("Pew Research Center | Nonpartisan, non-advocacy public opinion polling and demographic research", 2016). Many social studies surveys involving many respondents have confirmed that people who are religious are at lower risk of suffer or showing symptoms of depression, are less suicidal, are more sexual satisfied, are less likely to abuse substances and are generally happy about their sense of well-being (Seligman, 2002). On the other hand, it has been argued that links between religious beliefs and religion are usually weak; mainly relying on scripture and being broad in nature (Sharpe, 2007). This means that there are many links between religious beliefs and happiness or suffering. Additionally, numerous peer-reviewed journals have come to the general generalization that there is a strong relationship between religious beliefs and commitment with high signs of happiness, self-esteem and perceived sense of wellbeing (Snow and Trivigno, n.d.). They also conclude that religious commitment results in lower levels of delinquency, hypertension, and depression (Sung-Gun Kim, 2010). After extensive analyses of many journals on this topic, the trend observed was that these studies found out that psychological well-being (happiness, morale, and satisfaction) was associated with positive commitment to religious beliefs and activities with less substance abuse or depression ("NRC was established as an independent public organization in 1956", 2016).

Different religions have different beliefs about happiness. For instance, Buddhism: A major theme in Buddhist teaching is happiness. For people to handle suffering and achieve a high state of peace they are required to be happy. According to Buddhism, happiness can only be achieved by avoiding all forms of human desires (Wangu, 1993). An everyday form of happiness like maintaining a friendship or acquiring wealth is recognised as worthy means of achieving happiness (Toussaint and Friedman, 2008). Buddhism believes that everyone deserve happiness and people should be compassionate and loving to others. Judaism: Happiness is considered vital in serving God. The Bible states that people should be joyful and happy when serving Him (De Lange, 1986). This belief gives the Jew people motivation to be happier in their daily activities and when serving God; this helps them to manage depression and low moods effectively. Catholicism: In Catholicism, the main reason and goal of existence is happiness; it is believed that Gods plan for humanity is for people to be happy (Veenhoven, 2008); however, the ultimate happiness is not to be found in this world but rather the next life (Pegis, 1950). When one thinks about the goodness of God, he or she may experience a beautiful feeling of well-being.

In conclusion, the recent strides in understanding of happiness have come up with a few factors and components of happiness. Religion tends to fulfil most of them (Diener & Seligman, 2002). It can be argued that the main goal in this life is achieving happiness. Happiness has a lot to do with the personality of an individual and events that happen in their life. While happiness has an effect on the quality of life that one lives, optimistic people usually strive to achieve a high level of happiness. It can also be argued that religious beliefs are very important in determining the level of happiness that a person can achieve ("Martin Seligman", 2010). Numerous journal and research studies have come to a generalization that there is a positive link between religious beliefs and happiness. Despite the fact the people have the choice not to have any religious affiliations, it is important to understand the negative implications of not having any religious affiliations. Though happiness can be viewed in different context, people from different religions experience the same value of happiness.

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