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Mannheim, 9 December 2024

Press Release

Religiosity and a Sense of Community Crucial To People's Happiness

Religious people are particularly happy when they live in a country that they themselves perceive as religious. A new study led by Mannheim psychologist Vera Vogel has analyzed this interplay between personal beliefs and cultural environment.

Faith and religiosity play a particularly important role in the run-up to Christmas. This is also reflected in the fact that over 80 percent of people in Germany celebrate Christmas, even though only half of Germans still belong to a Christian denomination. A new study by the University of Mannheim now provides new perspectives on the connection between religiosity and personal happiness – and not just at Christmas. The study, published in the journal *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, shows: The more your personal religiosity matches the perceived religiosity of your country, the greater your mental and physical well-being. The sense of belonging to a community plays a decisive role here.

For their study, the authors surveyed more than 10,000 people in 24 countries worldwide. In addition to objective questions on personal religiosity – such as belief in God, frequency of prayer or church attendance – the participants were also asked about the perceived religiosity of their country as well as their psychological, social, and physical well-being – parameters that determine personal happiness.

India and some southern European countries such as Spain were rated as particularly religious by the test subjects – in contrast to Scandinavian countries, which ranked at the lower end of the scale. In this comparison, Germany ranks in the middle.

Group membership as the key to well-being

The researchers found that the well-being of religious people is greater in countries with a high level of religiosity than in less religious countries. For example, religious people in India tend to have a higher level of well-being than similarly religious people in Scandinavian countries.

“Previous research has shown that religiosity can increase one's well-being. Our results make it clear that this is only true when people perceive their country as religious,” explains first author Vera Vogel, a doctoral student at the Chair of Cross-Cultural Social and Personality Psychology. “The results are a testament to the importance of being part of a community,”

says Vogel. In addition to objective factors such as social support and neighborhood help, the subjective feeling of belonging to the “right” group plays a key role.

Recommendations for society

The study shows that a sense of community and networking are important factors for well-being – regardless of a country's religiosity. “Of course, you can't make a country more religious than it is,” explains psychologist Vogel. “But religious and state institutions could do more to connect people with each other.” A deeper sense of community strengthens the psyche and increases life expectancy - a benefit for society.

Original study:

Vera Vogel, Paul H.P. Hanel, Suzanne Hoogeveen et al. *When Reality Meets Perception: Well-Being Effects of Objective and Subjective Person-Culture Matches in Religiosity*. Social Psychological and Personality Science. <https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506241286548>

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