

Conference on Culture, Religion, and Eudaimonia

Abstract

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Title: Trends in religiousness and positive mental health in the United Kingdom

Introduction

In today's politically correct culture, it is somewhat provocative to say that the ultimate symbol of a perfect life and of the highest purpose, eudaimonia, is Jesus Christ on the cross. Yet, despite increasing rates of secularisation and public scandals affecting many churches, the extant academic literature generally suggests a significant positive affect of religiosity on happiness. The religious perspective on the good life would arguably entail concepts of moral values life self-reliance, self-sacrifice and charity, traditional family arrangements etc. Yet, many academics have used hedonic happiness or cognitive life satisfaction indicators, even though momentary snapshots of 'superficial' enjoyment could be quite the opposite focus of what religions teach. This situation is partly due to the fact that eudaimonic empirical indicators have only recently become available in mainstream social surveys.

The present papers employs the novel Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale (WEMWBS) with 7 waves of the UK Longitudinal Household Survey to address the broad research question, whether religiosity is associated with eudaimonic well-being. The WEMWBS is specifically designed to measure full mental functioning and especially eudaimonic well-being, and uniquely only consists of positively worded indicators. As such, it is possible to consider

- I *Which aspects of eudaimonia are most influenced by religiosity and whether religious belief affects very high levels eudaimonic well-being.* More commonly used measures like life satisfaction or happiness measured on a Likert scale suffer from ceiling effects and are highly clustered around a single most common value, while a true eudaimonic measure like the WEMWBS on a broad continuous scale can uniquely capture top levels of well-being.
- II *Whether religious belief has a differential effect on life satisfaction, negative mental health and eudaimonic well-being.* Ancient philosophers have debated the opposing definitions of happiness (such as Aristotle's eudaimonia vs. Epicurus' hedonia), and religious teachings often stress the importance of maximising righteousness and not fun or pleasure. This implies that eudaimonia as a distinct aspect of multi-dimensional mental well-being should have differential association with religiosity. Interactions for buffering or enhancing effects of the dimensions of well-being are also tested.
- III *Whether the association between religiousness and eudaimonia is stable over time, and whether changes in religious belief predict longitudinal changes in eudaimonia.*
- IV *The stated relationships vary for different religions, ethnicities and immigrant groups, thus whether cultural factors moderate the association between religion and eudaimonia.* The detailed questionnaire of the survey makes it possible to control for respondents' attachment to the religions they were brought up in

Questions I and II relate to the psychometric properties of eudaimonia, with a particular focus on differentiating eudaimonic well-being from competing psychological constructs and narrowing down the sub-dimensions of the eudaimonic WEMWBS scale. To answer these questions, I use structural equation models of multiple regressions analyses and latent measurements of well-being, while controlling for important co-variables like stable psychological traits (BIG5), socio-demographic and socio-economic factors and a battery of questions on religious beliefs and atten-

dance. For the third question I employ fixed effects and hybrid regression approaches, as well as a latent growth curve techniques (Schunck, 2013).

In addition to the obvious analytical problems of cohort differences between older and younger generations, as well as relatively few micro-level longitudinal analysis of changes in religious belief and happiness, hardly any researchers have differentiated between the various dimension and definitions of happiness when studying religious beliefs. The paper therefore makes a major contribution to the literature on eudaimonia and religion.

Results (selected preliminary findings)

TABLE 1: SEEMINGLY UNRELATED REGRESSIONS OF RELIGIOUSNESS AND COVARIATES ON THE DIMENSIONS OF EUDAIMONIC WELL-BEING

	Feeling optimistic about the future	Feeling useful	Feeling relaxed	Dealing with problems well	Thinking clearly	Feeling close to others	Able to make up own mind
Age	0.000 (0.75)	0.006*** (13.42)	0.013*** (29.31)	0.010*** (24.02)	0.011*** (28.34)	0.004*** (9.88)	0.008*** (20.30)
Female	0.083*** (6.93)	0.051*** (4.63)	-0.11*** (-9.64)	-0.050*** (-4.71)	-0.053*** (-4.99)	0.15*** (13.53)	-0.033** (-3.06)
Highest educational qualification	0.086*** (23.20)	0.057*** (16.70)	0.022*** (6.24)	0.034*** (10.33)	0.040*** (12.38)	0.029*** (8.19)	0.026*** (7.93)
Marital Status							
Single	-0.053** (-3.05)	-0.13*** (-8.33)	0.076*** (4.55)	-0.052*** (-3.34)	-0.040** (-2.58)	-0.21*** (-12.90)	0.013 (0.83)
In partnership	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Separated	-0.12*** (-6.03)	-0.16*** (-8.37)	-0.12*** (-6.49)	-0.12*** (-6.88)	-0.14*** (-8.03)	-0.27*** (-14.25)	-0.041* (-2.26)
Widowed	-0.0055 (-0.20)	-0.13*** (-5.41)	-0.010 (-0.41)	-0.0042 (-0.18)	-0.057* (-2.40)	-0.013 (-0.52)	0.035 (1.44)
Long-standing illness or disability							
None	0.23*** (17.83)	0.26*** (22.09)	0.31*** (25.76)	0.26*** (23.01)	0.25*** (22.66)	0.16*** (13.27)	0.16*** (14.46)
Employment status							
Not in employment	-0.031* (-2.29)	-0.19*** (-15.11)	0.036** (2.81)	-0.073*** (-6.10)	-0.048*** (-4.05)	-0.038** (-2.98)	-0.051*** (-4.21)
Religion makes a difference to my life	0.060*** (11.85)	0.055*** (11.76)	0.0072 (1.49)	0.0077 (1.71)	0.0078 (1.76)	0.027*** (5.66)	-0.014** (-3.14)
Constant	2.68*** (81.76)	2.87*** (95.49)	2.48*** (79.79)	2.91*** (100.61)	2.94*** (102.38)	3.19*** (103.49)	3.52*** (120.26)
Observations	24353	24353	24353	24353	24353	24353	24353
R-squared	0.057	0.069	0.065	0.052	0.060	0.039	0.027

t statistics in parentheses

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Table one suggests that not all dimensions of the WEMWBS scale correspond to religiosity: Those that relate to a sense of purpose, hope and connectedness, but not the ones about current mental well-being, are significant.

TABLE 2: SIMULTANEOUS-QUANTILE REGRESSIONS

	q15	q50	q85
Age	0.066*** (46.32)	0.049*** (18.55)	0.040*** (18.88)
Female	0.079 (1.31)	0.11* (2.22)	-0.029 (-0.44)
Highest educational qualification	0.42*** (14.41)	0.30*** (9.37)	0.10** (3.05)
Marital status			
Single	-0.56*** (-4.34)	-0.58*** (-6.82)	-0.20 (-1.46)
In partnership	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Separated	-1.24*** (-9.64)	-1.17*** (-11.34)	-0.58*** (-5.63)
Widowed	-0.55* (-2.15)	-0.24 (-1.54)	0.37 (1.95)
Long-standing illness or disability			
None	1.82*** (13.45)	1.58*** (22.09)	1.10*** (10.15)
Employment			
Not in employment	-0.73*** (-6.59)	-0.37*** (-5.02)	0.23 (1.88)
Religion makes a difference to my life	0.083 (1.80)	0.17** (3.09)	0.20*** (3.56)
Constant	15.3*** (114.10)	21.0*** (148.37)	25.8*** (111.79)
Observations	24353		

t statistics in parentheses

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

The results from table 2 powerfully indicate that religiousness mainly has an effect at the medium and top level of eudaimonia well-being, but not for those with low eudaimonic well-being.

TABLE 3: SEEMINGLY UNRELATED REGRESSION OF THE COMPETING MENTAL HEALTH DIMENSIONS AND PERSONALITY TRAITS ON RELIGIOUSNESS

	WEMWBS	Life satisfaction	GHQ
Age	0.0039*** (16.10)	0.0042*** (16.46)	0.000079 (0.30)
Female	0.043*** (6.54)	0.054*** (7.92)	0.00066 (0.09)
Highest educational qualification	0.025*** (12.48)	0.015*** (7.25)	0.0052* (2.41)
Marital status			
Single	-0.047*** (-5.26)	-0.072*** (-7.68)	-0.012 (-1.26)
In partnership	0 (.)	0 (.)	0 (.)
Separated	-0.12*** (-11.22)	-0.21*** (-18.85)	-0.090*** (-8.05)
Widowed	-0.038** (-2.59)	-0.073*** (-4.77)	-0.041** (-2.65)
Long-standing illness or disability			
None	0.12*** (18.02)	0.15*** (20.94)	0.099*** (13.90)
Employment status			
Not in employment	-0.013 (-1.85)	-0.012 (-1.66)	-0.029*** (-3.88)
Religion makes a difference to my life	0.013*** (5.03)	-0.0019 (-0.69)	0.010*** (3.54)
Agreeableness	0.021*** (6.52)	0.020*** (6.14)	0.0087* (2.52)
Conscientiousness	0.046*** (15.09)	0.024*** (7.38)	0.00011 (0.03)
Extraversion	0.024*** (9.85)	0.018*** (7.04)	0.013*** (4.95)
Neuroticism	-0.098*** (-43.77)	-0.061*** (-25.77)	-0.056*** (-23.13)
Openness	0.025*** (9.95)	-0.00077 (-0.29)	0.0025 (0.93)
Constant	-0.63*** (-20.91)	-0.44*** (-14.01)	-0.0080 (-0.25)
Observations	21487		
R-squared	0.200	0.114	0.055

t statistics in parentheses

* p<0.05 ** p<0.01 *** p<0.001

Table 3 demonstrates that religiousness does not equally affect the competing dimensions of happiness: Interestingly, life satisfaction does not appear to be increased by high religiousness, but the indicators for eudaimonic well-being and clinical mental health (GHQ) are positively associated with religiousness.

References

Schunck, R. (2013). Within and between estimates in random-effects models: Advantages and drawbacks of correlated random effects and hybrid models. *Stata Journal*, 13(1), 65-76. Retrieved from <http://www.econ.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:00000000-5766-84b0-ffff-ffffdcde59a1/sj13-1.pdf#page=71>