Happiness and Religious Retreat Attendance

Social Research Methods

Patrick Arbore

Notre Dame de Namur University

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Introduction

During the third century, devout Christians, both men and women, had begun to retreat from cities and villages to the deserts of North Africa and Asia Minor. There they searched for liberation from their corrupt society to find peace and happiness with their God (Gorg, 2011). Today we have retreat houses all over the world which are particular to various groups and religions. The common motive for making a retreat is to leave our normal routines and surroundings and taking time to be with God, study a particular workshop theme, or just stop and rest.

I personally started attending retreats around the time that I began my conversion to Catholicism in the mid 1990’s. Not only was I fed spiritually, but I also found that taking time to go on annual retreats sustained my peace of mind throughout the year. The fruits of withdrawing from the daily grind to dip into the pool of contemplation also had an impact on my performance at work. This is due to the fact that I am generally more happy when I went on retreat than not.

A common theme in the area of happiness research is the relationship between religion and happiness. Several articles have been written on the subject including: Psychological well-being and pilgrimage: happiness and life satisfaction of Ardh-Kumbh Mela pilgrims at Prayag, India, Maheshwari & Singh, (2009), and Religious Experiences and Their Relations With Happiness and Personality, Argyle and Hills (2000).

As a human services student I believe researching the concept of increasing happiness in your life by taking time for mental, physical and spiritual rest is important. My research hypothesis will suggest that Catholic workers that go on retreat will be happier than Catholic workers that do not go on retreat. Happiness will be defined as a score on the Oxford Happiness
Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 1998). My secondary hypothesis will be that female Catholics that go on retreat are happier than male Catholics that go on retreat. My null hypothesis will be that there is no difference in happiness between those Catholics that go on retreat and those that do not.
Review of Literature

This literature review is organized to the degree of relatedness to my research question. The first article is a review of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire which is a compact scale for the measurement of psychological well-being. The next 10 articles relate to my dependent variable of happiness. In an effort to explore another angle to my research I have included an article that uses happiness as an independent variable.

Hills & Argyle (2001) The purpose of this paper is to describe the improved scale and its psychometric properties, and by placing it in the public domain to allow its wider use and further examination by others. The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) was devised from the Oxford Happiness Inventory (OHI). The OHI is a lengthy measure of well being that comprises of 29 multiple choice items. The OHQ includes similar items to those of the OHI, each presented as a single statement but using a uniform six-point Likert scale. The revised instrument is compact and easy to administer. These items can also be easily incorporated into larger questionnaires in random order. One hundred and seventy two undergraduate students at Oxford Brookes University and their friends and relations (66 men, 99 men, seven unspecified) took part in the study. Ages ranged from 13 to 68 (mean = 30.9) years. Respondents were invited to complete and return a self-report questionnaire constructed from the OHI, OHQ, and a number of other published scales known to correlate with well-being. Results show that both OHI and the OHQ provide very similar results. The construct validity of the OHI was established by the
associations of the measure. In terms of construct validity, the OHQ appears to be the preferred measure. I found the paper easy to read and understood why they wanted to create another version that was more compact and easier for respondents to answer. The means was difficult to ascertain in this study due to the fact that they were measuring more than one scale in the questionnaire.

Jessie Dezutter, et.al (2010) the objective was to explore the role of the emotional experience of God in the happiness of chronic pain (CP) patients. The dependant variable is happiness, religiosity, and pain. The independent variable is positive and negative God image. In the study, they explored the relationship between God images and happiness when someone is confronted with a severe stressor like enduring pain. Results showed that happiness was positively related to positive God image and negatively related with a negative/angry God image. These findings indicate that distinct aspects of religion relate to happiness.

The sample population came from the board of the patient association. Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed by mail. One hundred thirty six patients filled out the entire questionnaire. Pain duration of at least six months was reached by all participants. The majority of the sample was female (72%) and the median age was 51.34. Majority of the patients were married (63%). The mean pain duration was 16 years. Majority of the participants were Catholic (31%). Level of church attendance for the majority was on special occasions (41%). Happiness was measured using the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire and the items were rated on a 6-point scale. For religiosity, a 5-point scale church attendance scale was used and denominations were measured with a single item. Additionally, the participants filled out the
Dutch Questionnaire of God Images which uses a 5-point Likert scale. For pain, three questions were asked (current level of pain, highest level of pain last week, lowest level of pain last week). I was unable to identify the mean score for the variables. I really enjoyed reading this particular article. I found it to be very interesting. I would think most people would assume that a positive God image would create happiness, particularly for people suffering. Now it has been proven.

Francis, et. al (2003) examined the relationship between religion and happiness amongst German students. The dependent variable is happiness, religion and personality. The independent variable is men and women. The data shows that there is no evidence for a relationship between religiosity and happiness among German students, contrary to the conclusions of recent studies that have been done in the United Kingdom and the USA. The same measurement devises were used in all studies. The population of the sample was 331 German students attending the University of Wurzburg that completed a short questionnaire. The majority of the participants were female (62%), and in in their twenties (90%). Most respondents were Roman Catholic (57%), Lutherans (30%), other groups (6%), no religious affiliation (7%).

Happiness was measured with the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, Martin and Crossland, 1989) (mean for males = 41.6, female = 43.1), Religiosity was measured with the Frances Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Frances and Stubbs, 1987) (mean for males = 78.0, female = 81.8), and Personality was measured using the short form of the revised Eysenk Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck, Eysenck and Barrett, 1985) (mean for males = 19.0, female = 20.6).
The statistics in the study show that there is a positive relationship between Christianity and happiness but the correlation disappeared after controlling for personality. I thought this was an interesting study due to them adding the dependant variable of personality which was different than most other studies I have read. It seems that more research needs to be done to pinpoint which element changed the numbers.

Frances, et. al (2012) looks at the association between the affective dimension of religion, and personal happiness. The dependent variables are happiness an attitude towards Christianity. The independent variable is men and women. According the researchers, the failure of the study to find a significant association between religion and happiness is important for two reasons. First, the findings caution to generalize conclusions within the psychology of religion formulated within specific cultural contexts. This study was done in Estonia, while other studies that showed a positive association between religion and happiness were done in the United Kingdom, United States and in Israel. Second, negative findings were also consistent with research done in Germany. The study is a reminder that there may be political and social contexts in which faith may bring personal struggle rather than joy, and social exclusion rather than inclusion. The sample population was 150 students (119 from a secular university and 31 from a Lutheran theological institute). The majority of participants were female (79%), and between the ages 18 and 20 years old (54%).

The affective dimension of religion was assessed by the Frances Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Eiken, Frances & Robbins, 2010) using a 5-point scale (mean = 70.6). Happiness was measured using the Oxford Happiness Measure (Eiken, Frances & Robbins, 2010) using a 5-
point scale (mean =94.3). I think that the study would have been better had the sample been a little more even in regards to having more students from the theological institute involved in the study.

Maheshwari, Singh (2009) examined the relationship of religiosity, happiness, and satisfaction with life in the case of pilgrims in a special cultural event. The dependent variables are religiosity, life satisfaction and happiness. The independent variables are men and women. Positive association between religiosity, happiness and life satisfaction was obtained. Results showed that gender did not have a significant role on these relations in the case of pilgrims. The sample population consisted of 154 Kalpvasis (pilgrims who stay at the banks of the Sangam for a month in the holy city of Prayag during the Mela period). The mean age of the sample was 61.38 years. 94 respondents were male and 60 were female.

The demographics of the questionnaire included age, gender, educational qualifications, marital status occupation, and place of residence – rural or urban. For the happiness measure the Summers and Watson’s (2005) Happiness scale was used. The Mean score for Happiness as 72.66. For satisfaction with life measure the Diener, Emmons, Larsen and Griffin (1985) Satisfaction with Life scale was used. The Mean score for Satisfaction with Life was 14.34. For the religiosity measure the Religiosity Scale of Bhushan (1971) was used. The Mean score for Religiosity was 31.14. The interviewer visited the holy site of Ardh Kumbh Mela for several days and spent considerable time interviewing the pilgrims. The interviewer was a local person. Each interview took more than 30 minutes. I found the article easy to read, but the survey seemed slightly skewed since most of the participants were elderly.
Argyle and Hills (2000) examined religious experiences and their relations with happiness and personality. Research papers that the authors felt gave them inspiration to delve into this topic were William James (1902) studies on the medieval Christian mystics and other famous religious individuals and concluded that they were induced by some kind of psychological disharmony. Also Spilka and McIntosh (1995) reported that many who have such experiences were previously in some form of distress such as depression, fear, dread, feelings of sin, or a crisis of meaning. The dependant variables in this research paper are happiness, mystical experience, personality, preference for solitude, self esteem and empathic tendency. The independent variable is church member and non-church member. Three hundred sixty-four participants (127 men, 237 women) were recruited from the residents of Oxfordshire by personal contact with a variety of church and leisure groups, Oxford Brookes and Oxford Universities, and by advertisements in public places. The participant’s age range was between 18 to 83 years with a mean of 41.8 years. The Religious affect scale was a 25 6-point scale that included items from the following scales: The Happiness measure was the Oxford Happiness Inventory (1995). Hoods (1975) Mystical Experience Scale was used to assess transcendent, immanent, social, and sensory components. Eysenck Personality Questionnaire was used for a extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, and lie scale. Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg 1989). Preference for solitude scale (Burger 1995). Empathic Tendency Scale (Mehrabian & Epstein 1972). The questionnaire was administered in two parts, 12 months apart. The first part, which contained the religious affect scale (231 responses) and the second part, containing frequency and intensity of mystical experiences (273 responses). Both questionaries’ included all remaining scales (140 participants completed both questionnaires).
The Religious affect scale was factor analyzed and broken these into three factors. To ensure maximum relevance to religious affect, the analysis was restricted to those who were either member of churches or non-members of churches that reported spiritual experiences. Mean of Factor 1 (immanent items), $t(122) = -2.28$. Mean of Factor 2 (socially related items) $t(122) = -2.56$. Mean of Factor 3 (transcendent items and two sensory items) $t(122) = -2.64$.

The study showed that mystical experiences were relatively common, that most are mild, and that church members report twice as many as non-members. The ratio of mild or intense experiences is similar for church members and non-members. It was not possible to demonstrate an association between experiences and greater happiness. No evidence was found to support the suggestion that some form of psychological distress is a precursor of mystical experience.

I found the study to be very interesting, but felt that an independent variable of men and women should have been added to the paper. I can only conclude that they did not feel that this was relevant.

Tsaur, Yen, Hsiao (2012) examined transcendent experience, flow and happiness for mountain climbers. The dependent variables being transcendence, flow, and happiness. The independent variables were veteran mountain climbers and novices. Ewert (1994) organized individual levels of mountaineering experience into three categories: novice, intermediate, and highly experienced (or veteran). As mountaineers grew in experience, they appeared to move along a continuum of motivating factors spanning from mechanical items (learning how to climb) and grater intrinsic and automatic meaning (exhilaration and self-expression) The questionnaire was an on-site survey conducted at Shei-Pa National Park’s Syue Mountian Trail in Taiwan. The survey was given to mountain climbers after they climbed a mountain of over 3000 m. It was distributed at
two locations: the entrance at 2140 m. and the lodge at 3100 m. It was conducted the moment that the activity concludes to obtain respondents optimal experiential effects. Of the 388 surveys returned 14 invalid questionnaires were deleted, resulting in 339 valid samples or 87.37%. 71.7% were males and 28.3% were females. 71.1 of the respondents were of the ages between 21 and 45 years. 29.8 % had one year of mountain climbing experience. 45.1% had ten times of mountain climbing (veterans), followed by 25.7% having 1-2 times of mountain climbing experience (novices).

The questionnaire used the five-point Likert scale. Transcendent experience was measured using the mysticism scale by Hood (1975), Flow was measured using the Flow State scale by Jackson and Marsh (1996), Happiness was measured using the Personal Expressive Activity Questionnaire by Waterman (1993). Research results show that the relationship among mountain climbers’ transcendent experience, flow and happiness are significantly positive. Transcendence to flow $t = 9.97$, flow to happiness $t = 6.15$, and transcendence to happiness $t = 6.80$. Flow occurs when action and consciousness merge and when a balance is achieved between a challenge and skills commensurate with challenge. When individuals gain flow from the mountaineering activity, they acquire more happiness. When flow is not present, they perceive less happiness.

There seems to be limitations to this research. The mountain trail used is considered an entry level route in which the route pathways are distinct and facilities are present. This could have an effect on the results due to participants experience of flow and or happiness.
D. Ruiz-Aranda, et al (2014) examined the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and well-being indicators (life satisfaction and happiness) in female student health professional at a school of health sciences in Spain. The dependant variables are Emotional Intelligence, Perceived stress, satisfaction with life, and happiness. The independent variable is men and women. The study suggests that EI is an important predictor of well-being. Emotionally intelligent people evaluate situations as less stressful, which results in a higher satisfaction with life and happiness. The sample population from the university ranged in age from 18-50 (mean 21.41). 38.3% were students of physiotherapy, 33.3% students of nursing, 17% students of occupational therapy, and 11.4% students of chiropody.

For Emotional Intelligence the instrument used was the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test MSCEIT (2002). A consensus criteria is used for scoring (Mean = 0.44). For Perceived Stress the PSS (Cohen, 1983) was used with a scale of 5 response options (Mean = 2.19). Satisfaction with Life was measured using the SWLS (Diener, 1985) using a 7-point scale (Mean = 5.34). Happiness was measured using the Subjective Happiness Scale SHS which also uses a 7-point scale (Mean 5.20). Participants were selected from a random sampling. They completed the MSCEIT and then returned 12 weeks later and completed PSS, the SWLS, and the SHS. I thought the study was interesting, and as usual with some of these scientific articles hypothesis and what is proven seem to be common sense.

Patterson & Price (2012) Research examines the link between church attendance, happiness, self-reporting pornography use. The dependant variables are church attendance, happiness, and self-reporting pornography use. The independent variable is women and men. The data used comes
from nationally representative cross-sectional data General Social Survey (GSS). Results show men who attend church regularly are 56% less likely to report seeing an X-rated movie over the last year. Corresponding difference for women is 49%. Protestants are the least likely to report they have seen an X-rated movie. The results indicate there is a relationship between reported pornography use and religious participation. The relationship though is not clear. It is possible that those attending church are less likely to consume pornography, or it could mean they are more compelled to underreport consuming pornography. Since 1973, the GSS have consistently asked whether the respondent has viewed an X-rated movie in the last year. Interestingly enough, the rates of pornography use have not changed drastically over time.

Statistics from the GSS: Reported being very happy (mean for male = .318, women = .327), attendance (male = .355, female = .486), Watched an X-rated movie (male = .303, female = .167), age, race, marital status, religion, income, religion. I found the idea of trying to connect happiness, and religious attendance to people that do not look at pornography, but as stated, you don’t know if the self reporting is accurate.

Jung (2013) examines the connection between religious attendance and happiness. Additionally, the researcher looks at the question of whether religious attendance buffers against the harmful effects of stress on happiness, and do gender and religious affiliation have any effect on these associations. The dependant variables are happiness, religious attendance and stress. The independent variables are women and men, and religious affiliation. The results show that those that attend religious services more frequently report higher levels of happiness. Results also show that stressors are less likely to decrease happiness when people have high levels of
religious attendance. Interestingly enough, these findings only hold true to women protestants, according to this survey. This is possibly contributed to various cultural reasons. The study draws its statistics from the 2009 Korean General Social Survey (KGSS). It is a nationally representative survey of 1,599 Korean adults that is modeled after the General Social Survey (GSS). Happiness is measured with a 5-point scale (mean for men = 3.48, women = 3.49), and the Ordinal Least Square (OLS) regression analysis is used to examine happiness as the focal dependant variable. Religious attendance is measured with an 8-point scale (mean for men = 3.03, women = 4.11), and Stress is measured with a 4-point scale (mean for men = .012, women = -.004). Demographics included: gender, age, marital status, education, income, religious affiliation. The survey was interesting but there were definitely some cultural aspects to it that may have thrown off the numbers. Men do not go to church as much as women in South Korea, possibly due to oppression of women. Women are more likely to use religion as a form of support during stressful times than men. In regards to the survey weighing more heavily on Protestantism it is not clear. Perhaps there were more Protestants that answered the survey.

Abdel-Khalek (2006) testing for an association between gender differences in happiness, health, mental health and religiosity. The sample was comprised of 2210 (1,056 males, 1,154 females) volunteer Kuwaiti Muslim undergraduates from Kuwait University. The mean age was 20.7 years. Males had a significantly higher self-rating mean score of happiness and mental health than females, while females had a significantly higher religiosity mean score than their male counterparts.
Four separate self-rating scales were used to assess happiness, physical health, mental health and religiosity with a ten-point rating scale. The criterion-related validity of the self-rating scale of happiness was computed against the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle et.al, 1989) denoted a good criterion validity of both scales (mean for males = 7.05, females = 6.59). The criteria-related validity of the self-rating scale for physical health against the Somatic Symptoms Inventory (Adel-Khalek, 2004) denoted good validity (mean for males = 7.76, females = 7.66). The rating scale for mental health was compared to the Kuwait University Anxiety Scale (Abdel-Khalek, 2000) denoting a good criterion related validity (mean for males = 7.35, females = 6.93). Regarding validity for religiosity (mean for males = 6.12, females 6.36), the article states that data are now being collected. The data suggests that mental health had more to do with happiness than religiosity. I found the study somewhat interesting but think they might have different results if the demographics were different. I also thought they should use a more common scoring methods to find their numbers.

Childs (2010) In this research article the author examines religious attendance and happiness. In all studies the author has researched happiness is the dependent variable and has found no articles that in which anyone has argued that happiness leads to increased levels of religious attendance. People who are happy may be more likely to be more socially active and participate in religious services. The dependent variable in the study is religious attendance, and the independent variable is happiness.

The data used comes from nationally representative cross-sectional data (General Social Survey), and from a nationally representative panel study (National Survey of Families and Households).
Statistics from the GSS: happiness (mean = 2.57), attendance (mean = 5.37), age, education, health, gender, race, marital status, income, religion, sociability scale (mean = 1.95), perceived relationship with God (mean = .2.57), perceived social cohesion with congregants (mean = 3.36).

Statistics from NSFH: happiness (mean = 4.18), attendance (mean = 4.22), age, education, health, gender, race, marital status, change in marital status, income, religion, sociability scale (mean = 13.30)

The first analysis uses the GSS to examine whether one’s relationship with God of one’s social cohesion within a congregation mediate the relationship between attendance and happiness. Happiness is measured with a 3-point scale (not happy - very happy). Religious attendance is measured with a 8-point scale (never – several times per week). Results show a positive association between attendance and general happiness.

The second analysis uses the NSFH to examine relationship between attendance and happiness. Happiness was measured with a 7-point scale (very happy – very unhappy). Attendance is measured by asking how many times do they attend services. Results were adjusted to look like GSS. Results of the article confirm past assumptions that relationship between religious attendance and happiness mediated by both ones perceived relationship with God and ones perceived relationship with congregants. Also religious attendance is a significant but smaller predictor of happiness. No significant relationship between happiness and attendance. I enjoyed this article due to the fact that they were trying to switch things up in regards to common variables. More research is probably needed with better measuring scales to prove their theory that happiness leads to attendance rather than the common theory that attendance leads to happiness.
Methodology

The population for this study will be comprised of adults over 21 (male and female), that identify as members of the Catholic religion. They must be able to read, write and comprehend the English language reasonably well enough to complete the demographic and happiness questionnaire. The sample will be purposive and small due to time constraints.

The subjects of this study will be from the Santa Clara and San Mateo counties and will comprise of friends, family and acquaintances.

The participants will be solicited by being asked to complete a questionnaire. The questionnaire will be handed out, in person, to approximately 30 people. They will be greeted in the following manner, “Hello, my name is David Muir, and I am conducting a survey for my degree at Notre Dame de Namur University. The project I am working on is for my Social Research Methods class. Would you be willing to complete this survey for me? There is no identifying information in the survey and it will be completely anonymous.”

The data will be collected by use of a paper based survey. Part one of the survey will be comprised of demographic data such as: age, gender, ethnicity, religion, retreat attendance, level of education, marital status, and annual income. Part two of the survey will be made up of the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 1998), which has 29 questions devised as a broad measure of personal happiness. Participants will respond on a uniform six-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”.
References


Thank you for taking part in my research project. Please select one answer for each question. All questions must be answered.

**Please indicate your age**
- [ ] 21-30
- [ ] 31-40
- [ ] 41-50
- [ ] 51-60
- [ ] 61-70
- [ ] 71-80

**Please indicate your sex**
- [ ] Female
- [ ] Male

**How would you describe yourself?**
- [ ] Native American
- [ ] Asian
- [ ] Black or African American
- [ ] Pacific Islander
- [ ] White
- [ ] Other / Choose not to answer

**Religion**
- [ ] Christian / Roman Catholic
- [ ] Christian / Protestant
- [ ] Hindu
- [ ] Muslim
- [ ] Buddhist
- [ ] Other / Choose not to answer
Have you ever been on a retreat, religious or otherwise?

- No
- Yes, but only once in my life
- Yes, annually (about once per year)
- Yes, more than once a year

Highest level of education

- High School
- Some College
- Two Year College Degree
- Bachelors Degree
- Masters Degree
- PhD, MD, etc..

Marital Status

- Single
- Significant Other
- Married
- Divorced

Annual Income

- Less than $25,000.
- $25,000. - $50,000.
- $50,000. - $75,000.
- $75,000. - $100,000.
- More than $100,000.
INSTRUCTIONS. Below are a number of statements about happiness. Would you please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each by entering a number alongside it according to the following code:

1 = strongly disagree  
2 = moderately disagree  
3 = slightly disagree  
4 = slightly agree  
5 = moderately agree  
6 = strongly agree

You will need to read the statements carefully because some are phrased positively and others negatively. Do not take too long over individual questions; there are no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ answers and no trick questions. The first answer that comes into your head is probably the right one for you. If you find some of the questions difficult, please give the answer that is true for you in general or for most of the time.

1y. I don’t feel particularly pleased with the way I am
2. I am intensely interested in other people
3y. I feel that life is very rewarding
4. I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone
5. I rarely wake up feeling rested
6. I am not particularly optimistic about the future
7. I find most things amusing
8. I am always committed and involved
9. Life is good
10. I do not think that the world is a good place
11. I laugh a lot
12y. I am well satisfied about everything in my life
13y. I don’t think that I look attractive
14. There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done
15. I am very happy
16y. I find beauty in some things
17. I always have a cheerful effect on others

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<tr>
<th>1 = strongly disagree</th>
<th>2 = moderately disagree</th>
<th>3 = slightly disagree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 = slightly agree</td>
<td>5 = moderately agree</td>
<td>6 = strongly agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

18y. I can fit in everything I want to

19. I feel that I am not especially in control of my life

20. I feel able to take anything on

21y. I feel fully mentally alert

22. I often experience joy and elation

23. I do not find it easy to make decisions

24. I do not have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life

25. I feel I have a great deal of energy

26. I usually have a good influence on events

27. I do not have fun with other people

28. I don’t feel particularly healthy

29y. I do not have particularly happy memories of the past

Thank you for again for taking part in my research project.