



RESEARCH REPORT

Religion and Happiness: still no association

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ABSTRACT *A number of recent studies have consistently reported a positive association between religiosity and happiness, when happiness is operationalised in terms of the Oxford Happiness Inventory and religiosity is operationalised in terms of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity. However, this general finding is not consistent across other measures of either construct. The present aim was to examine the generalisability of the link between religion and happiness using the Francis Scale and the Depression–Happiness Scale. Among two samples (Anglican priests and members of the Anglican Church), no significant associations were found between scores on the religiosity and happiness measures. Further research is now required to clarify the components of happiness that are associated with the Francis Scale.*

Introduction

In response to both theological and psychological enquiry, a growing number of studies have examined the relationship between religion and happiness employing a variety of samples and measures (see Robbins & Francis, 1996). The results of these studies have been largely equivocal. In contrast a consistent finding has been reported from a recent series of interrelated studies that have examined the relationship between religion and happiness by employing the Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle *et al.*, 1989) and the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis & Stubbs, 1987) among different populations.

These studies have included: 360 undergraduates in the UK (Robbins & Francis, 1996), 212 undergraduates in the USA (Francis & Lester, 1997), 994 15- to 16-year-olds in England (Francis *et al.*, 2000), 456 first-year undergraduate students

attending one institution in Wales (Francis *et al.*, 2000), 496 members of a branch of the University of the Third Age in the south of England (Francis *et al.*, 2000) and 295 individuals, ranging in age from late teens to late seventies (Francis & Robbins, 2000). All seven samples have demonstrated a significant positive correlation between happiness and attitude toward Christianity.

In an attempt to examine the generalisability of the link between religion and happiness, Lewis *et al.* (1997) examined the relationship between scores on the Francis Scale and the Depression–Happiness Scale (McGreal & Joseph, 1993), an alternate measure of happiness to that of the Oxford Happiness Inventory. However, in contrast to previous work with the Francis Scale no significant association was found between attitude toward Christianity and happiness. To account for this inconsistency Lewis *et al.* (1997) proposed that the discrepancy could be explained in terms of the difference in the operationalisation of happiness between the two studies. They suggested that the Oxford Happiness Inventory is primarily related to the intensity of happiness, while in contrast the Depression–Happiness Scale measures the frequency of happiness.

Such theorising is in part supported by the finding of Joseph and Lewis (1998) who examined the association between the Oxford Happiness Inventory and the Depression–Happiness Scale among a sample of 100 university students. Although they report a significant positive association between the two measures ($r = 0.59$), it is clear from this correlation that these two measures are not assessing precisely the same construct.

To test the differential functioning of the two measures of happiness, French and Joseph (1999) administered the Francis Scale alongside both the Oxford Happiness Inventory and the Depression–Happiness Scale. Among a sample of 101 English undergraduates significant positive associations were found between the Francis Scale and the Oxford Happiness Inventory and between the Francis Scale and the Depression–Happiness Scale. French and Joseph (1999) do not report the association between the two measures of happiness.

In light of the growing interest in the relationship between religion and happiness, and specifically the discrepancy between findings of Lewis *et al.* (1997) and French and Joseph (1999), the present aim was to further examine the association between the Francis Scale and the Depression–Happiness Scale among two religious samples.

Method

Sample

Two independent samples were obtained. The first sample comprised 64 Anglican priests, living in the North of England. Ages ranged from 41 to 65, with a mean age of 55.35 years (SD 4.7 years). The second sample comprised 70 members of the Anglican Church, living in the North of England. Ages ranged from 43 to 67, with a mean age of 53.93 years (SD 5.2 years). There was no significant difference in mean age between the two groups ($t = 1.70$, $p > 0.05$).

Questionnaires

All respondents completed a questionnaire booklet containing two self-report measures.

The short-form of the Francis Scale of Attitude Toward Christianity (Francis, 1993) is a seven-item scale, concerned with attitudes to topics including the Bible, prayer, church, God and Jesus. It is scored on a five-point scale: disagree strongly (1), disagree (2), uncertain (3), agree (4) and agree strongly (5). Scores range from 7 to 35, with higher scores on the scale indicating a more positive attitude towards Christianity.

The Depression–Happiness Scale (McGreal & Joseph, 1993; Joseph & Lewis, 1998) is a 25-item scale designed to measure positive affect. It contains 12 items concerned with positive feelings (e.g. I felt happy) and 13 items concerned with negative feelings (e.g. I felt sad). Items concerning negative feelings are reverse scored so that lower scores on the scale indicate a lower frequency of positive feelings and a higher frequency of negative feelings. Respondents are asked to think about how they have felt in the past seven days and to rate the frequency of each item on a four-point scale: never (0), rarely (1), sometimes (2), and often (3). Scores range between 0 and 75, with higher scores indicating a higher frequency of positive feelings and a lower frequency of negative feelings.

Data analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package, using the reliability, descriptive and correlation routines (SPSS Inc., 1988).

Results

In both samples satisfactory levels of internal reliability (Cronbach, 1951) were found for both the Francis Scale (sample 1: $\alpha = 0.91$, mean = 33.53, SD = 1.5; sample 2: $\alpha = 0.90$, Mean = 27.55, SD = 4.0) and the Depression–Happiness Scale (sample 1: $\alpha = 0.82$, mean = 49.31, SD = 4.9; sample 2: $\alpha = 0.84$, mean = 45.82, SD = 4.5). These statistics demonstrate the high internal reliability of both instruments. The sample of Anglican priests recorded both significantly higher scores on the Francis Scale ($t = 11.16$, $p < 0.001$) and on the Depression–Happiness Scale ($t = 11.55$, $p < 0.001$) than the sample of members of the Anglican church.

Using Pearson product moment correlations, no significant association was found between scores on the Francis Scale and scores on the Depression–Happiness Scale, for either the sample of Anglican priests or the Anglican parishioners (sample 1: $r = 0.14$, $p > 0.05$; sample 2: $r = -0.08$, $p > 0.05$).

Discussion

These data further confirm that, among two English religious samples, there is no significant relationship between religiosity and happiness, when happiness is defined

in terms of the construct defined by Joseph and Lewis (1998) and operationalised through the Depression–Happiness Scale and when religiosity is defined in terms of the construct refined by Francis and Stubbs (1987) and operationalised through the Francis Scale. As such these results clearly replicate those of Lewis *et al.* (1997) among Northern Irish students, but contradict those of French and Joseph (1999) who report a significant relationship between the Francis Scale and the Depression–Happiness Scale among English students. The discrepancy between the two studies is intriguing given the use of common instruments and similar samples, and is therefore clearly in need of further examination.

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