

Examining Religious Meaning-Making

Aim of the study: To examine religious meaning-making through empirical means. The primary aim is to clarify how well this meaning-making works, i.e. to evaluate it on the basis of functional criteria.

Method: To do so statistical data is drawn from the international study program, World Values Survey (WVS). Especially data concerning the Nordic countries.

Research questions:

1. Is meaning-making a religious 'speciality'?
2. If so, do people actually get a meaning in life through religion?
3. And does it mean something to their general perception of life?

Some findings...

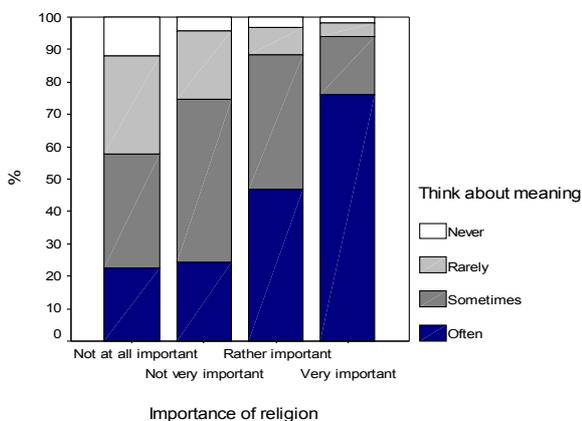


Fig. 1: WVS Denmark - thinking of meaning as a function of religiosity. Religious people tend to think more about meaning and purpose in life. In Denmark this trend is very strong.

A series of figures indicates that religious respondents experience less meaninglessness. E.g. 5% of them indicate that they "often" have a feeling of meaninglessness. Twice as many atheists (11%) say the same thing (sig. .000).

Also there is a negative correlation between religiosity and meaninglessness regardless of whether one in the last couple of weeks have ever felt "depressed or very sad". Those who did feel depressed have a γ -value of $-.140$ (sig. .000), while it is $-.127$ (sig. .000) for those who did not.

It may be that religious people to a lesser extent 'translate' their joys and sorrows into a sense of meaninglessness.

If so, their perception of meaning possibly affects their general life experience in a positive way. Given the strong negative correlation between meaninglessness and happiness, it could be that religious people *become* happier, cf. fig 2.

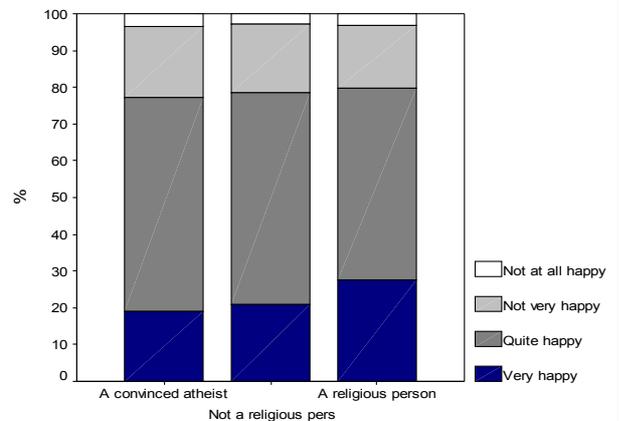


Fig. 2: WVS - happiness as a function of world view. Religious people seem to be slightly happier.

Nordic figures roughly displays the same trend as the international in fig. 2, although the Nordic correlation is slightly stronger ($\gamma = .150$; sig. .000). 29% of Nordic atheists are "very happy". The non-religious figure is 31% and for the religious it is 39% (sig. .000). The corresponding figure for those who indicate that religion is "very important" is 43% (sig. .000).

Conclusions

- Figures could indicate that making meaning is indeed a kind of religious 'speciality'. Certainly, they denote that religiosity is closely related to reflecting on the meaning of life – especially in Denmark.
- There seems to be a positive correlation between religiosity and happiness across various groups – both internationally and in the Nordic countries.
- It seems that religious people are better able to *make* sense of life.
- Religious meaning-making seems to be an important explanatory variable for the correlation between religiosity and happiness.
- Religion apparently functions in an efficient manner when giving meaning to life, i.e. in a way which has a real and positive impact on believers' experience of life.

Information:

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Paper: "Religiøs meningskabelse – analyser af World Values Survey", *Chaos* no.50, 2008, Museum Tusulanums Forlag, København:101-128 (also **available in English**).