

LET US PRAY: RELIGIOUS INTERACTIONS IN LIFE SATISFACTION

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Abstract

We use recent survey data on 30000 individuals in twenty European countries to consider possible spillover effects of individual religiosity on life satisfaction. We use three different measures of religiosity: denomination, churchgoing and prayer.

We find, as is usual, that own religious behaviour is positively correlated with individual life satisfaction, controlling for demographic characteristics and country fixed effects. Average religious behaviour in the region also has a positive impact: people tend to be happier in regions with a higher proportion of religious individuals. Religious activities positively affect both those who are religious and those who are not. In contrast, greater number of “atheists” (those who say they do not belong to any religious denomination at present) has *negative* spillover effects for the religious and the non-religious alike.

Our findings suggest that Protestants like to be in the dominant religion, while the well-being of Roman Catholics is unaffected in such case. One possible explanation for this difference may be the different institutional structure of these churches. Since Protestants do not have a “Rome”, the settings of their regional church may have a greater impact on them.

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