

Prayer's Ability to Combat a Decrease in Subjective Well-Being

Jane Gardner¹

Abstract

Subjective well-being (SWB) plays an extremely valuable role in an individual's life by laying the foundation for assessing their overall life satisfaction. Due to its significance, it has become a heavily researched topic in the field of Social Psychology. Unfortunately, a lot of this research has suggested that SWB seems to decline in adolescence for many people. The aim of this paper is to research the act of praying as an intervention that may help combat this decline through typically accessible means. To do this, the Conservation of Resources theory (COR) is used to take a theoretical approach to how the act of praying has shown improvements in SWB. COR claims that individuals' desire to secure different resources will benefit their lives and promote higher levels of well-being; in this case, practicing prayer is seen as resource gain (Bickerton & Miner, 2021). The research was conducted by seeking out published research that examined how praying may or may not have led to an increase in SWB within their samples.

Examining empirical studies that each focused on different demographics and different forms of SWB was intentional so that the conclusion drawn from this examination may be more applicable to the general population. After examining three separate empirical studies, a thorough analysis was conducted to determine whether the results indicated that praying is truly an effective intervention to combat a decrease in SWB. These studies include a longitudinal study that examines the effect of praying on kindergarten students' general SWB (Pandya, 2018), a cross-sectional study that examines participants with past traumas and how praying has led to posttraumatic growth (PTG) (Harris et al., 2010), and a second longitudinal study that examines self-identifying Christians and how certain types of prayer and identification leads to greater life satisfaction (Krause & Hayward, 2013). Ultimately, while noting the study's limitations, it seems that there is indeed a correlation between prayer and an increase in SWB. The analysis of the studies showed that praying led kindergarten students to experience a heightened SWB, trauma survivors to experience greater PTG, and higher levels of general life satisfaction in adults who prayed often. Because the concept of SWB can be generalized to many aspects of one's life, examining studies that cover different demographics, different areas of improvement in SWB, and the comparison of non-religious and religious individuals using prayer as an intervention allowed the drawn conclusion to account for a large proportion of people.

¹ Level 4 Undergraduate Student, Honours Social Psychology Program, Faculty of Social Sciences, McMaster University, Hamilton, Ontario, Canada

References

- Bickerton, G. R., & Miner, M. (2021). Conservation of resources theory and spirituality at work: When a resource is not always a resource. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/rel0000416>
- Harris, J. I., Erbes, C. R., Engdahl, B. E., Tedeschi, R. G., Olson, R. H., Winskowski, A. M. M., & McMahonill, J. (2010). Coping functions of prayer and posttraumatic growth. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 20(1), 26-38. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10508610903418103>
- Krause, N., & Hayward, R. D. (2013). Prayer beliefs and change in life satisfaction over time. *Journal of Religion and Health*, 52(2), 674-694. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10943-012-9638-1>
- Pandya, S. P. (2018). Prayer lessons to promote happiness among kindergarten school children: A cross-country experimental study. *Religious Education*, 113(2), 216-230. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2017.1393181>