

## Life Satisfaction and Altruism among Religious Leaders

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### ABSTRACT

Life satisfaction can be a maneuvering force towards furtherance and growth as it plays an important role in determining well-being of an individual. The happier and satisfied an individual is, more he will take interest in fulfilling his duties and societal roles. Altruism is a characteristic of a person which can be beneficial for the society as altruistic people are helpful, empathetic and proactive. Religion is closely related to altruistic activities and religious leaders are expected to be of helping nature and higher life satisfaction. The present study examines relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among religious leaders. The sample was selected using purposive sampling (N=25). Christian Church leaders were evaluated on life satisfaction and altruism scales. Results revealed a significant correlation between altruism and life satisfaction among religious leaders.

**Keywords:** *Life Satisfaction, Religion, Religious Leaders, Altruism.*

In every society religion is found to be of importance that gives people a direction to lead lives. Since religious leaders are expected to be spiritual and strong, certain qualities like ability to guide, give direction and lead people, console them, be empathetic, supportive and generous towards people in need are expected to constitute them. Altruism is one of the qualities that play an important role in making a religious leader. The word Altruism is derived from the Latin word "ALTER" which means "OTHER". Definition given by Post (2002) explains altruism as 'An altruist person is socially proactive, empathetic and of helping nature.' Baston (1994) describes that the "ultimate goal increasing the welfare of one or more individuals other than oneself" Religion is commonly considered as a foundation of altruism. Teachings about loving one's neighbor, kindness towards the poor, and providing for the needy are a part of altruistic behavior. Research has come up with positive relationships among aspects of religious commitment and such manifestations of altruism as engaging in volunteer work, giving money to charities, and valuing helping the needy (Smith 2003). Youniss, McLellan, and Yates (1999) explored in their study that adolescents who showed a high interest in religion were much more probable than other adolescents to participate in volunteer

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activities. Emmons, 1999; Pargament et al., 2005 considered altruism as one of the global goals of religion and hence it can be stated that religion facilitates altruism and add altruism to the value system of the individual.

Religion is an extremely potent source of values for individuals as well as for entire cultures (Baumeister, 1991). Religion supplies a framework for determining what is right and good and to be sought after, and for determining what is wrong and bad and to be avoided. Since divine will can be considered the ultimate arbiter of right and wrong (Baumeister, 1991; Emmons, 1999), religions are in an unusually esteemed position to be able to determine or establish these criteria of right and wrong and good and bad; they may, in fact, be the most powerful source of values in many cultures (Baumeister, 1991). Religion also plays an important role in influencing judgement, motivational and emotional qualities and hence has a grave impact on decision making (Fernando and Jackson, 2006)

Altruism can be a motivating factor for an individual in several ways. Altruism or social interest are considered to be associated with enhanced life adjustment. A better adjustment increases life satisfaction (Lohmann, 1977). Another factor closely associated with altruism is self-interest. According to Jensen (1993) self-interest is consistent with altruistic motives. In other words it can be stated that altruism is a reinforcement for the individual to involve in helping behaviour and several positive emotions are associated with altruistic behaviour which become a reinforcement for each altruist act. Studies by Cohn et.al (2009), (Watson, 2005) indicated that positive emotions increase life satisfaction by building resilience. Hence it can be inferred that an act of altruism is associated with several positive emotions like happiness, satisfaction, sense of being desirable and fruitful for others. This further enhance life satisfaction in the individual.

Altruism also plays a role in enhancing physical and mental health of the individual. Crandall (1984), (Miller, Denton, Tobacyk, 1986) in their study found that it decreases hopelessness and depression (Crandall 1978). Also, altruism has been associated with physical health status (Zarski, Bubbenzer & West, 1986) and decreases life stress (Crandall, 1978). Acts of altruism are often supported and valued by religion and considered a part of religious practice in almost all the religions. Altruism literally means performing socially fruitful act without gaining something in return. (Batson 1994). However, as discussed above, unconscious motives and reinforcing factors may contribute to each altruist act.

Altruism and life satisfaction are both closely related to meaningfulness of life. Crandall & Lehman (1977), Zarski, Bubbenzer, & West (1982) Irvin D. Yalom (1980) mentioned in his book "Existential Psychotherapy" that the feeling of leaving the world a better place to live in, helping others, involvement in charity have provided life meaning for many individuals. Altruism associated with religious faith can be more satisfying and rewarding for the person as it adds to the meaningfulness of life and provides a purpose of existence.

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Life satisfaction is the subjective sense of well-being in an individual which can greatly affect a religious leader's work performance. Subjective well-being is often associated with happiness of a person and how meaningful a person considers his life to be. As a religious leader, since a person is willingly taking responsibility of well-being of the entire community, his own sense of well-being becomes very significant. It is questionable to guide and mentor others if the person himself significantly lacks sense of well-being. It is hence needed to understand the gravity of the responsibilities related to the position of a religious leader and the associated constructs that help the person play the designated role. It is hence intended to examine the relationship between altruism and life satisfaction among religious leaders. Reason for choosing religious leaders as a sample of study is because they are involved in practices that enhance their understanding about self and the people around. We hypothesise that religious leaders having high altruism will also have high satisfaction of life.

### METHOD

The study was conducted on 25 church leaders. The data was collected from different churches in the city as per inclusion and exclusion criteria.

#### **Inclusion Criteria:**

- a) Church leaders of a religious group
- b) Age range from 25 to 70 years
- c) Educated up to graduation
- d) Individuals of either sex
- e) Leading a church for minimum one year.

#### **Exclusion Criteria:**

- a) Education level lower than graduation
- b) Individuals with pre-existing psychiatric or organic condition
- c) Experience less than one year as a church leader.

#### **Tools**

1. **Socio-demographic and Personal data sheet:** A semi-structured Performa was drafted for the study containing information about the socio-demographic variables like age, sex, education, marital status, religion, socioeconomic status and domicile of the subjects.
2. **Satisfaction with Life scale:** The scale is given by Pavot & Diener (1993). It is a 5-item scale which measures global cognitive judgments of one's life satisfaction. Participants indicate how much they agree or disagree with each of the 5 items using a 7-point scale that ranges from 7 strongly agree to 1 strongly disagree. The SWLS is revealed to be a valid and reliable measure of life satisfaction, suited for use with a wide range of age groups and uses.
3. **Scale of Altruism:** Self report scale by Rushton, J.P et al. (1981) was used. It consists of 20 items with 5 response options i.e. never, once, more than once, often and very often. Each item is scored from 0 to 4. Possible scores ranged from 20 to 100. The scale establishes high internal consistency and correlates with peer ratings, situational tests, and other questionnaire measures of altruistic tendency.

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### *Procedure:*

The participants were thoroughly explained about the nature and purpose of the study. Consent was then obtained from the participants. They were given the questionnaires of the tests. The researcher was present while each participant filled the questionnaire to clarify if there are any doubts related to items. The assessment was completed in one session with each participant. The atmosphere for the assessment was calm and conducive. After administration of the tools, scoring was done as per the scoring procedure given in the test manual. Correlation test was used for statistical analysis of the scores. SPSS was used for the analysis.

## **RESULTS**

*Table 1.1 Characteristics of Participants*

Characteristics		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Female	4	16.0
	Male	21	84.0
	Total	25	100.0
Socio economic Status	Low middle	6	24.0
	Middle	19	76.0
	Total	25	100.0

**Table1.2 Age frequencies of the participants**

Age	Frequency	Percent
25	2	8.0
26	2	8.0
27	2	8.0
28	1	4.0
29	2	8.0
30	2	8.0
34	1	4.0
36	1	4.0
37	3	12.0
43	2	8.0
45	1	4.0
47	2	8.0
53	1	4.0
55	1	4.0
62	1	4.0
63	1	4.0
Total	25	100.0

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**Table 1.3 Correlation values for Altruism and Life satisfaction**

			Altruism	Life Satisfaction
Spearman's rho	Altruism	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.400*
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.048
		N	25	25
	Life Satisfaction	Correlation Coefficient	.400*	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.048	.
		N	25	25

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The Spearman's correlation for Altruism and Life satisfaction was .400 indicating a positive relationship between both variables, significant on 0.05 level.

### DISCUSSION

The present study examines the relationship between life satisfaction and altruism. Results revealed a positive correlation between life satisfaction and altruism. Which means high altruism contributes to high life satisfaction and vice a versa. Spiritual leadership is concerned with the fundamental needs of both leader and follower for spiritual survival so they turn out to be further organizationally devoted and fruitful (Louis W. Fry, 2003).

A study by Dulin et.al. (2001) showed that altruism is predictor of life satisfaction that goes consistent with our study. According to their study, altruistic involvement had influence on life satisfaction for low-income, older adult community service providers. They found that people who were involved in community services for altruistic reasons instead of monetary or other material benefits had higher life satisfaction than others. As we know that religious leaders have more social interest and they are more involved in social activities. A study by Rich Gilman (2001) is in accordance to findings of our study that indicated that greater social interest was considerably associated with higher levels of overall satisfaction, as well as satisfaction with friends and family. Similarly, Capara and Steca (2005) also found that prosocial behavior directly influenced life satisfaction and these results are in favor of our findings. Most of these researches support the results of the present study.

According to C Schwartz et al (2003) helping others is associated with higher levels of mental health, psycho-spiritual, and demographic factors. They also found that role expectations and a positive belief system inspire and strengthen altruistic social interest behaviors. Many researches e.g (Baumeister, 1991, Youniss, McLellan, and Yates 1999, Emmons, 1999; Pargament et al., 2005), indicate that religion supports and facilitates altruistic behavior and altruism enhances life satisfaction. People who involve in altruism have higher life satisfaction. All these studies and research findings support our hypothesis that religious leaders high on altruism will be high on life satisfaction.

The limitation of the present study was that it was conducted on a small sample and religious leaders were also chosen from one religion. So it cannot be generalized for all other religions. For future directions, doing a similar research on a larger sample would be giving better

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results. Also taking up religious leaders from different religions and comparison among them will give us a better picture.

Overall, the results were interesting and could be studied in a wide variety of population with the different religious leaders that that whether such is the case with all religions or it is limited to few religions only. These findings can be implied in the society as the altruistic traits of the religious leaders could be utilized for enhancing the societal conditions and causes.

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