

Life satisfaction in priesthood: an inter-religious study

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ABSTRACT

The life satisfaction of the priests is of utmost importance as they are seemingly the closest to self-actualization but in the end are mere mortals and they too have mundanities of life to deal with and the duties of the priest aren't just limited to the place of worship while they deal with their own issues, they help people navigate through the vagaries of human experience, there is no common definition of priesthood across all faiths and they don't have anyone they can go for guidance, they are sometimes lost themselves. The present study was conducted to obtain the Life Satisfaction score through purposive sampling which consisted of 60 male participants above the age of 45 years of age. The L-S Scale designed and prepared by Alam & Srivastava was used. The objective of the study is to explore the life satisfaction among priests across religions and the difference between life satisfaction across religions. The obtained results show the current state relating to their level of life satisfaction which show out of 60, none of the participants had high level of life satisfaction. These findings can be attributed to being unemployed, in low-income scale groups. The research findings showed the dire situation of the priests meanwhile the populous looks up to them to be the remedy for their own day-to-day problems and the priests' own well-being needs to be addressed at the earliest.

Keywords: *Life Satisfaction, Priests, Religion, Economic Satisfaction, Social Satisfaction*

A priest is a religious leader authorised to perform the sacred rituals of a religion, particularly as a mediator between human beings and one or more deities (**Priest / Definition of Priest by Merriam-Webster, 2019**). They also have the authority or power to administer religious rites. The need to read sacred texts and keep temple or church records helped to foster literacy in many early societies. There is no common definition of the duties of priesthood between faiths; but it generally includes mediating the interaction between one's congregation, worshippers, and other representatives of the religious body, and performing religious rituals and rites.

India, the land of heritage and diversity is a concoction of the major religions of the world, it is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikhism. Rigorous religiosity is a salient characteristic of the nation. As per **the Census of India (2011), 79.8% of the population**

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Received: January 16, 2021; Revision Received: February 23, 2021; Accepted: March 12, 2021

practice Hinduism, 14.2%- Islam, 2.3%- Christianity, Sikhism, Zoroastrianism and Judaism also have thousands of followers here. India is the beacon of religious diversity.

Religion plays a crucial role and is intertwined in the lives of Indians. Leaders of faith are held in high regard and their perspectives on different aspects are stringently followed by millions. One common aspect about all the religions in India is **the role of the preacher**. A pujari or archaka is a Hindu priest of the temple, may be both male and female. It is mainly their duty to conduct regular prayers at the temple (puja). The required qualification to be a priest is that the person must know required chants fluently in Sanskrit and be similar with the material required to perform puja and various ceremonies (**“Hindu Worker/Occupational Description,” n.d.**). An Imam is the closest to a priest in Islam. The primary duty of an Imam is to lead services of Islamic worship. The Imam is present at the mosque for each of the five daily prayers, to lead the prayers. In traditional Islamic sciences, one has to go through years of study. First Arabic, then fiqh (jurisprudence) study, 'aqidah (creed/belief), Quranic studies, study of Hadith, spirituality, among others. In Christianity, the minister is a person allowed to perform functions such as teaching by a church or other religious organisation confession; leading ceremonies such as marriages, baptisms or funerals; or otherwise offering moral direction to the culture.

The aim of every religion is personal growth and general wellbeing of man, at the same time urging him to lean towards oneness and stay away from the evils of materialism and being satisfied with the gift that is life itself. Thus, the variable that was chosen for this study was life satisfaction as it encompasses all the aspects that every religion primarily focuses upon. Life Satisfaction can be defined as the degree to which a person evaluates the overall quality of his or her life. In other words, how much person likes the life he or she leads (**Veenhoven, 1996**). Maximizing citizens' happiness and life satisfaction (i.e. subjective well-being) has been the favored measure of social progress (**Greve 2010; (Stiglitz et al., 2009); Veenhoven 2008**), and research shows that factors including religion influence subjective well-being (SWB). Empirical research has documented a positive association between religion / spirituality and the SWB of people. Most of the findings suggest that religion / spirituality is beneficial in terms of people's sense of personal well-being and, in particular, in areas such as: expressing emotions (**Kim-Prieto and Diener 2009**), encouraging good virtues (gratitude, caring and charitable action)

This research attempted to answer the following questions: Is there a difference between the life satisfaction among priests of different religions? What are the dimensions of the difference in the life satisfaction among priests of different religions? What is the degree of disparity of inter-dimensional differences?

Rationale

In the current times, criminals resort to becoming priests for the sake of being absolved in the eyes of the society and often run criminal outfits under the guise of religion. This study targets to establish a framework which talks about the current state of affairs and pave a road ahead for future research and solutions towards their psychological well-being by analysing priests, their way of life, their practices and draw inferences of the same by focusing on the life satisfaction they have and its dimensions. Even though there exists a multitude of religions in the nation, the core teachings tread along similar lines, the study takes into account the major religions of India and the priests, tries to find the difference in the life satisfaction of the priests of various religions, the reasons for the disparity and the dimensions that highlight the said dissimilitude.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Objectives

- To explore the life satisfaction among priests across religions and the difference between life satisfaction across religions
- To investigate the inter-dimensional differences among the life satisfaction across religions

Hypotheses

1. The priests across religions will be high on life satisfaction.
2. Priests across religions high on social and economic dimensions will have a higher overall life satisfaction.

Participants

Sampling Method: Purposive Sampling

The sample comprised of 60 adult priests, 20 Hindu Priests, 20 Muslim Priests, 20 Christian Priests. Their age ranged from 45 years and above.

Research Design

Ex-post Facto Research

Materials

Life Satisfaction Scale (L-S Scale)

The L-S Scale was designed and prepared by Q.G. Alam & Dr. Ramji Srivastava published in 2001 by National Psychological Corporation, Agra (Alam & Ramji, 2001). The L-S Scale comprises of 60 items related to six areas of life viz. Health, Personal, Economic, Marital, Social and Job. Test-Retest reliability was computed after a lapse of 6 weeks. The obtained quotient was 0.84. The validity of scale was obtained by correlating it with Saxena's Adjustment Inventory and Srivastava Adjustment Inventory. The quotient obtained was 0.74 and 0.84 respectively.

Procedure

All the places temples, mosques and churches were selected beforehand and then were visited and willing subject was selected using purposive sampling technique and a rapport was established with the subjects to get him comfortable. The questionnaire of Life Satisfaction Scale (L-S Scale) was given and the subject was instructed thoroughly regarding it, any questions the subject may have, were answered. There was no time limit on answering the questionnaire and the subject was informed regarding the same. The same procedure was repeated for the other 29 subjects. The scoring was done and the raw scores were converted into t-scores as given in the manual and according the manual their level of satisfaction was calculated. Mean of the dimensions were compared across 3 religions and all the data was tabulated.

Scoring

The scale has 60 items with each item having two alternatives.

Areas of Life Satisfaction	Number of Items
Health Satisfaction	1,5,7,8,16,22,40,45,56,60
Personal Satisfaction	9,10,23,28,29,30,31,33,34,59
Economic Satisfaction	2,3,11,12,18,24,35,41,46,49
Marital Satisfaction	4,13,19,25,36,15,47,51,54,57
Social Satisfaction	14,20,28,37,38,43,48,52,55,58
Job Satisfaction	6,15,11,21,27,32,39,44,50,53

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For each item marked, scoring was: -

Yes- 1 (Satisfaction)

No- 0 (Dissatisfaction)

The sum of marks is obtained for the entire scale.

Variables

- Life Satisfaction
- The religion

RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

On analysing the data collected and converting the raw scores into t-scores by referring to manual of L-S scale, the level of satisfaction among the 60 subjects is as follows,

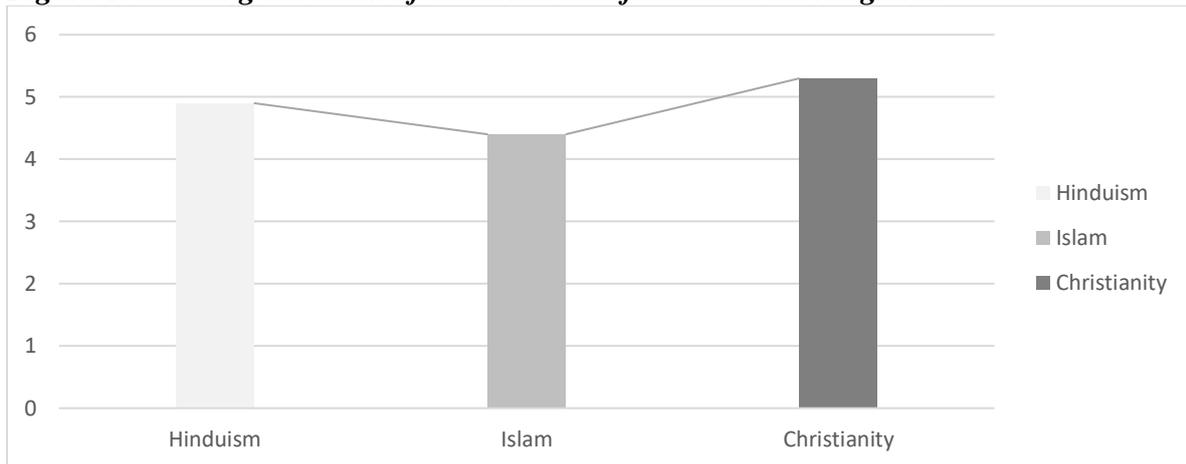
Table 1: Showing the satisfaction level and the number of priests in each level.

Satisfaction level	No. of priests
High	0
Average	22
Low	38

The results recorded in TABLE 1 shows the different levels of life satisfaction among 60 priests. With 38 having low level of life satisfaction out of which 12 belonged to Hindu religion, 16 to Muslim and 6 to Christian. The average level of life satisfaction was recorded among 22 priests out of which 6 belonged to Hinduism, 4 belonged to Islam and 12 were from Christianity religion this can be attributed to higher level of SWB amongst Buddhists and Christians compared to Nonreligious people and people with other religions (**Rözer & Kraaykamp, 2013**). It is particularly important to take note that none of the priest had high life satisfaction which rejects the first hypothesis which states that priests across religions will be high on life satisfaction. This was based on observation and empirical evidence, several studies found a positive relationship between spirituality as well as religiosity and life satisfaction (**Dong Pil Yoon & Eun-Kyoung Othelia Lee, 2004**). It has been proposed that people who feel more connection and influence from a higher force, that is, people who display high religious and spiritual engagement, appear to offer a more optimistic assessment of their lives to justify these results (**Vishkin et al., 2016, 2019; Ramsay et al., 2019**). Most results imply that religion/spirituality is of some benefit in terms of the sense of personal well-being of people and particularly in areas such as: expressing emotions (**Kim-Prieto and Diener 2009**), fostering good virtues (gratitude, caring and charitable actions) (**McCullough et al. 2002**), coping with adversity (**Fischer et al. 2010**), and social connections (**Jung 2014**). However, the current research differs from these finding which can to attributed to being unemployed, or being in low-income scale groups (**Ngamaba and Soni, 2018**).

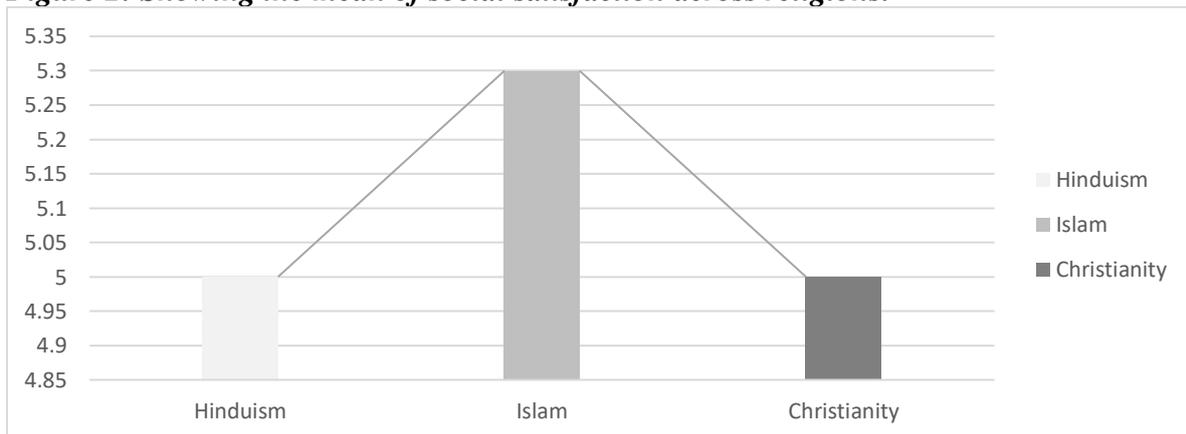
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Figure 1: Showing the mean of economic satisfaction across religions.



For the second hypothesis, which states that priests across religion high on social and economic dimensions will have a higher overall life satisfaction is rejected because it can be clearly seen in TABLE 1 that no priests are high on life satisfaction which in turn can be reasoned to low economic and social satisfaction among them. For economic dimension, FIGURE 1 positive responses across religion, the item numbers are 2,3, 11, 12, 18, 24,35,41,46,49. The responses were given in Yes/No. Yes Responses indicate satisfaction, whereas No indicate dissatisfaction. On careful analysis of the data of each of the priest it was found that there were yeses on this dimension on a mean of 4.4 out of the 10 statements for Hinduism, 3.3 out of 10 for Islam, and Christianity had a mean of 5.3 out of 10. This result can be a reason for the decreased life satisfaction as there is a strong positive relationship between financial satisfaction and life satisfaction (Lee and Lee, 2019).

Figure 2: Showing the mean of social satisfaction across religions.



For social satisfaction, FIGURE 2 show the positive responses across religions, the statement which pertain to this are 14,20,28,37,38,43,48,52,55,58, in this dimension the mean yeses were 5 out of 10, 5.3 out of 10, 5 out of 10 for Hinduism, Islam and Christianity, respectively. But it fails to boost up the overall life satisfaction of the priests. Study showed a disparity in the wellbeing of Muslims and Christians due to the way these religious groups interact with stressful incidents and adversity. While Muslims were significantly more likely to seek social support from family, Christians were more likely to use intrapersonal coping strategies (Fischer et al., 2010).

Summary

The purpose of the research was to explore the life satisfaction among priests across religions and to find the inter-dimensional differences among the life satisfaction across religions. The hypotheses thus formulated were the priests across religion will be high on life satisfaction and the second, priests across religions high on social and economic dimensions will have a higher overall life satisfaction.

The obtained results show rejection of the hypotheses, this was based on empirical evidences. These finding can to attributed to being unemployed, in low-income scale groups (Ngamaba and Soni, 2018) which in fact true based on observation. Keeping the shortcomings and recommendations in mind, the sample size can be increased further, the age limit was 45 years and above to filter for experienced respondent, it can be manipulated to cast a wider net and get data from different people. Only two demographic variables were controlled- age, gender. In further research, variables like income of family, family type, housing situation, family size, marital status, and number of family members can be included.

CONCLUSION

The study shows the life satisfaction among the priests which is the foundation stone for further analysis of their overall mental well-being because people look up to them, the study is relevant because it reflects the actual situation of the priests to be dire and shows that there is a need for supplemental income sources which can be provided by vocational training and eradicating the stigma of them being able to have another 'job' to sustain themselves and their family while serving people and God.

This study is especially important during Covid-19 as history can be traced on religions were influencing peoples' responses to epidemics, the epidemics themselves may have helped shape religions. "When people feel threatened, they tend to form cooperative groups," says Michael Blume, an expert in religious studies at the Friedrich Schiller University of Jena in Germany, who was not involved with Hughes's study. As per Blume, when masses moved to cities, an alternative for families was needed, and religion served that purpose. "When you have disease, it's augmenting this process." Particularly among Christians, being part of a congregation ensured some help would be available in times of need, Blume proposes. Thus, the wellbeing of priest is all the more important right now.

This study can be used as a basis for further research to provide solutions to the existing problems deeply rooted in the ignorant society.

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Acknowledgement

The author appreciates all those who participated in the study and helped to facilitate the research process.

Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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How to cite this article: Manzoor A. & Shukla A. (2021). Life satisfaction in priesthood: an inter-religious study. *International Journal of Indian Psychology*, 9(1), 675-682. DIP:18.01.070/20210901, DOI:10.25215/0901.070