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Religiosity and Happiness among Homeless Men

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Abstract:

This exploratory study examines the relationship between religiosity and happiness among homeless men, staying in a shelter of a faith-based organization. The study participants (N = 45) were chosen by using purposive sampling method. Besides a questionnaire for the demographic items, Religious Belief Scale (RBS) developed by Martin and Nichols (1962) and Hills and Argyle's(2002) Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) were used to collect data. The study has revealed that there is no significant correlation between participants' religiosity and their happiness. The study has also revealed that religious resources have helped the participants to stay clean from addiction. Participants have also reported that their hope in life has been restored. Implications of the study and suggestions for future research are discussed.

Keywords: Homelessness, religiosity, happiness

1. Introduction

Homelessness is a serious and a heart-rending social problem across the globe, which reflects poverty and the resultant social inequalities(Gash, Washington, Moxley, & Feen-Calligan, 2014; Moxley, Washington, & McElhaney, 2012). Despite homelessness being a "very complex problem requiring a multitude of services, coordination, and public support" (Berman, & West, 1995, p. 236) and the homeless people "suffering from the highest degree of social exclusion and the most difficult situations" (Panadero, Guillén, & Vázquez, 2015, p. 324), research shows their religiosity amidst adversity (Belcher, 2003;Gash,Washington, Moxley, & Feen-Calligan, 2014; Snodgrass, 2014; Swinyard, Kau, & Phua, 2001; Washington, Moxley, Garriott, & Weinberger,2009).

While spirituality may be generic, religiosity is specific. For example, Swinyard, Kau, and Phua, (2001) define religiosity as "the degree to which beliefs in specific religious values and ideals are held and practiced by an individual" (p. 17). Thus, homeless persons who are religious may be consistently engaged in "prayer... and reading spiritual literature" (Washington, Moxley, Garriott, & Weinberger, 2009, p. 437) in order to cope with the ill-effects of homelessness. Moxley, Washington, and McElhaney (2012) report that their research "points to the importance of prayer" as a form of support among homeless persons (pp. 439-441). Belcher (2003) suggests, "A person who is homeless, dressed in tattered clothes ...picks up a Bible ... the act of picking up the Bible most likely represents an act of coping with the overwhelming hopelessness of their lives" (p. 183).

Homelessness is not a virtue but a vice. Nevertheless, as indicated by research, it is astonishing to note homeless persons' religiosity and thus their ability to cope with life's challenges. The sight of them looking for alms, being exposed to extreme weather, sleeping on the floor, being unable to take care of health and hygiene, to mention a few, is distressing. Despite having gone through such hardships, homeless persons who are staying in a shelter are found to be laughing together, which only evokes a sense of wonder. As Charry (2004) has asserted, "God-centered life is joyous" (p. 19), one begins to think whether it is because of their religiosity, homeless persons are able to laugh together. Against this background, the author wanted to explore whether there might be an association between homeless persons' religiosity and their happiness.

Doodman and Safari (2017) define happiness as "one of the human psychological needs that constantly preoccupies human attention because of having a major impact on his/her life" (p. 17). According to Charry (2014), God meets this human psychological need because "God is key to happiness in this life" (p. 20). Research shows a positive association between religiosity and happiness (Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011; Lewis & Cruise, 2006). But, there are also some "contradictory findings" (Lewis & Cruise, 2006, p. 213). While there is a good number of research on religiosity and happiness with different populations and a fairly good number of research on spirituality of homeless persons, the author could not find any research on religiosity and happiness among homeless persons. Therefore, this exploratory study was carried out with the following objectives:

1.1. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the relationship between participants' religiosity and happiness.
- To find out the difference between select demographic characteristics of the participants and the study variables.
- To analyze the association between religious resources, such as daily chapel service, Bible study, Scripture memorization, and Sunday service and participants' ability to stay clean from addiction.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The study participants were men (N=45) enrolled in a shelter of a Christian non-profit organization called, Faith Mission situated in Wichita Falls of Texas. Established in 1958, the organization provides the following services to homeless men, women, and children: shelter, meals, 6 months residential recovery program for persons struggling with addiction, job training, daily chapel, and weekly Bible study. Using purposive sampling method, only men who stayed at the shelter for at least two nights and who were able to read English were chosen for the study.

2.2. Measures

Religious Belief Scale (RBS) developed by Martin and Nichols (1962) was used to assess participants' religiosity. Religious Belief Scale (RBS) is a paper-and-pencil, 41 item true-false inventory, 18 of which are negative and thus are reverse scored. RBS is a measure of Judeo-Christian religious belief in individuals. RBS score ranges from 0 to 41. It has a reliability coefficient of .95. High scores suggest acceptance of religion and religious teaching. Religious belief scale centers around belief... in the Bible, in the efficacy of prayer, in an afterlife, in a personal God who is near and present, in the divinity of Jesus, and in the church and religion as necessary for a good life. (as cited in Hill & Hood, 1999, pp. 54-55)

To assess participants' happiness, Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (Hills & Argyle, 2002) was used. Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) consists of 29 "single items that can be answered on a six-point Likert scale... demonstrated high scale [reliability of] 0.91" (Hills & Argyle, 2002, pp. 1074-1075) ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). According to Hills and Argyle (2002), "The inter-item correlations... for the OHQ were -0.04 to 0.65, mean 0.28" (p. 1075). "Three items are reverse scored. Scores range from 8 to 48, with higher scores on the scale indicating a greater level of happiness" (Cruise, Lewis, & Mc Guckin, 2006, p. 124).

In addition to RBS and OHQ, a questionnaire that consisted of demographic items, such as, age, race and ethnicity, religion, education, marital status, to mention a few, was also used.

2.3. Procedures

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Midwestern State University, located in Wichita Falls, Texas. The questionnaire and the informed consent form were reviewed by the CEO and the Case Managers of Faith Mission and few changes were made to questions pertaining to the demographic items. After obtaining consent from the CEO to carry out the study, the author (who at the time of the study was a volunteer) met with a few study participants initially to explain the purpose of the study and informed them that their participation was voluntary and they had the option to drop out of the study at any time. Later on, for the rest of the participants, the Case Managers explained the purpose of the study and informed them that their participation was voluntary and they had the option to drop out of the study at any time. Data were collected from those who consented to the study, in less than two months.

2.4. Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and entered into SPSS 23.0 version. Analysis of data involved the use of Mean, Median, Range, Standard Deviation, One Way Analysis of Variance, Pearson's correlation, and Chi-square.

3. Results

3.1. Participants' Demographic Profile

The mean age of the participants was 42 years (SD = 12.33). The age ranged from 19 to 63 years. The mean length of time (in months) as homeless persons was 35.76 months (SD = 69.65) and the mean length of stay at the shelter (in months) was 13.98 (SD = 34.44). In terms of race and ethnicity, a great majority (71.1%) were Caucasians, followed by African Americans (20%). More than half of them (53.3%) were single, while the next 24.4% were divorced, and an equal percentage of them (11.1%) were married and separated, respectively. With regard to religion, a vast majority (88.9%) were Christians, a very small percentage (4.4%) identified themselves as Atheists, and three of them did not indicate their religion. In terms of education, more than half of them (53.3%) were high school graduates, while the next 13.3% of them had an Associate Degree, followed by an equal percentage (11.1%) with a GED and no schooling, respectively.

When asked about the reasons for their homelessness, they reported, "job loss" (60.98%), "substance abuse" (43.90%), "mental illness" (31.71%), and "physical disability" (19.51%) as the reasons for homelessness. Berman and West (1995) have reported similar causes for homelessness. To the question, "When you were homeless, what kind of hardships did you face?" they reported as follows: lack of health care (75.76%), hunger (53.13%), social rejection (46.88%), and lack of employment (40.63%).

To the question whether the organization that runs the shelter had "helped them restore hope in life," a great majority (81.8%) responded in the affirmative. Also, majority (63.6%) responded in the affirmative to the question whether it had "helped them to stay clean from addiction." But, when asked whether it had "helped them to become employable," majority (61.4%) responded in the negative.

3.2. Participants' Religiosity

With regard to select positive statements of the Religious Belief Scale (RBS), the participants responded as follows: "God is very real to me" (95.6%); "Religion gives meaning to my life" (86.7%); "If I were without my religion and

my understanding of God, I would have little left in life" (71.1%); "I believe the Bible is the inspired Word of God" (97.7%); "God is constantly with us" (97.8%); "I attend church to worship God with devotion and to gain guidance for everyday life" (95.6%).

With regard to select negative statements of the Religious Belief Scale (RBS), the participants responded as follows: "I am not a religious person" (11.1%); "I can take religion or leave it" (27.3%); "I think the Bible is full of errors, misconceptions, and contradictions" (4.4%); "The Bible in many ways has held back and retarded human progress" (6.7%).

Table 1 shows participants' level of religious belief (Religiosity Belief Scale) and happiness (Oxford Happiness Questionnaire), which are categorized into 'low' and 'high' based on median score.

Variable	Low (%)	High (%)
Religious belief	24.4	75.6
Happiness	48.9	51.1

Table 1: Median Score of Participants' Religiosity and Happiness

As shown in Table 1, a great majority (75.6%) of the participants have scored high on religious belief which indicates their acceptance of religion and religious teaching. More than half (51.1%) of the participants have scored high in their level of happiness. Their responses to the statements pertaining to Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ) are depicted in Table 2.

As stated earlier, the Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), consisting of 29 single items can be answered on a six-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (6). But, Table 2 presents participants' responses, combining them into two categories, namely, 'agree' and 'disagree'.

Statement	Agree	Disagree
I don't feel particularly pleased with the way I am	25 (55.5)	20 (44.5)
I am intensely interested in other people	33 (73.3)	12 (26.7)
I feel that life is very rewarding	35 (77.8)	10 (22.2)
I have very warm feelings towards almost everyone	29 (64.4)	16 (35.6)
I rarely wake up feeling rested	25 (55.5)	20 (44.5)
I am not particularly optimistic about the future	17 (37.8)	28 (62.2)
I find most things amusing	32 (71.1)	13 (28.9)
I am always committed and involved	34 (75.6)	11 (24.4)
Life is good	38 (84.4)	7 (15.6)
I do not think that the world is a good place	24 (53.3)	21 (46.7)
I laugh a lot	33 (73.3)	12 (26.7)
I am well satisfied about everything in my life	16 (35.6)	29 (64.4)
I don't think I look attractive	17 (37.8)	28 (62.2)
There is a gap between what I would like to do and what I have done	32 (71.1)	13 (28.9)
I am very happy	33 (73.3)	12 (26.7)
I find beauty in some things	40 (88.9)	5 (11.1)
I always have a cheerful effect on others	35 (77.8)	10 (22.2)
I can fit in (find time for) everything I want to	24 (53.3)	21 (46.7)
I feel that I am not especially in control of my life	24 (53.3)	21 (46.7)
I feel able to take anything on	30 (66.7)	15 (33.3)
I feel fully mentally alert	29 (64.4)	16 (35.6)
I often experience joy and elation	38 (84.4)	7 (15.6)
I don't find it easy to make decisions	15 (33.3)	30 (66.7)
I don't have a particular sense of meaning and purpose in my life	12 (26.7)	33 (73.3)
I feel I have a great deal of energy	31 (68.9)	14 (31.1)
I usually have a good influence on events	33 (73.3)	12 (26.7)
I don't have fun with other people	9 (20.0)	36 (80.0)
I don't feel particularly healthy	23 (51.1)	22 (48.9)
I don't have particularly happy memories of the past	24 (53.3)	21 (46.7)

Table 2: Participants' Responses to the Statements of OHQ

Note. Figures in Parentheses are Percentages

As shown in Table 2, a great majority (73.3% and 84.4%) have agreed to the statements, "I am very happy," and "I often experience joy and elation," respectively. A great majority (77.8%) have also agreed to the statement, "I always have a cheerful effect on others." But, to the statements, "I am well satisfied about everything in my life," and "I don't have particularly happy memories of the past," majority (64.4% and 53.3%, respectively) have disagreed.

3.3. Pearson's Correlation between Participants' Religiosity and Happiness

The study has revealed that there is no significant correlation between participants' religiosity and their happiness ($r = .101, p > .05$).

One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was computed for select demographic characteristics and the study variables, which are presented in Table 3.

Variables	Source	Sum of Squares	Mean Square	df	F	Significance
Marital status vs. RBS	Between Groups	11.606	3.869		3	$p > .05$
	Within Groups	118.210	3.477		34	
Marital status vs. OHQ	Between Groups	287.547	95.849	3	.439	$p > .05$
	Within Groups	8516.639	218.375	39		
Race vs. RBS	Between Groups	2.967	1.483	2	.423	$p > .05$
	Within Groups	119.304	3.509	34		
Race vs. OHQ	Between Groups	396.020	132.007	3	.630	$p > .05$
	Within Groups	7967.599	209.674	38		

Table 3: ANOVA for Select Demographic Characteristics and Study Variables (RBS & OHQ)

ANOVA indicated no significant difference between demographic characteristics (marital status and race) and religious belief and also happiness (see Table 3).

As described earlier, in addition to providing shelter to the homeless persons, the organization chosen for this study also provides religious resources (daily chapel service, weekly Bible study, Scripture memorization, and Sunday church service) to deal with life's challenges, including addiction to substances. Test of association (Chi-square) was performed to find out if there was any association between religious resources and participants' ability to stay clean from addiction. Table 4 portrays the test results.

Religious Resources	Test Statistic for Difference between Samples	Cramer's V
Chapel service	$X^2 = .354$ (Not significant)	.090
Scripture memorization	$X^2 = 10.375$ (Significant)	.486
Bible study	$X^2 = 10.644$ (Significant)	.492
Sunday church service	$X^2 = 15.808$ (Significant)	.599

Table 4: Association between Religious Resources and Staying Clean from Addiction

It may be observed in Table 4 that except for chapel service, other religious resources such as, Scripture memorization, Bible study, and Sunday church service are significantly related to participants' ability to stay clean from addiction.

4. Discussion

Consistent with the findings of Panadero, Guillén, and Vázquez (2015), the study has revealed that there is no relationship between participants' religiosity and their happiness. However, as referred to earlier, this is contrary to the existing research about the relationship between religiosity and happiness (for example, Diener, Tay, & Myers, 2011; Lewis & Cruise, 2006).

As reported earlier (see Table 1), a great majority (75.6%) have scored high on Religious Belief Scale (RBS), which could be due to the religious resources (Bible study, Scripture memorization, Sunday church service, and daily chapel) provided by the organization, and more than half (51.1%) have scored high on Oxford Happiness Questionnaire (OHQ), which could be due to the positive vibe manifested at the shelter. At the time of volunteering, the author did not notice any negative vibe but only positive vibe at the shelter. In their study, Panadero, Guillén, and Vázquez (2015) have reported that "around half the homeless people... were happy" (p. 327) but in the present study, a great majority (73.3%) have reported that they were very happy.

Positive influence of the religious resources, such as Bible study, Scripture memorization, and Sunday church service in enhancing participants' ability to stay clean from addiction is evident from the study. As Büssing, Ostermann, and Matthiessen (2005) have discussed, religiosity is helpful in exercising control over one's life. However, the study did not reveal any positive influence of daily chapel service.

Berman and West (1995) have suggested, "Historically, religious organizations...have provided... services to the homeless" (p. 236). Besides providing shelter and meals, the organization of this study also provides religious resources. Consistent with the findings of Snodgrass (2014) and Walsh and Gulbrandsen (2014), a great majority (81.82%) of the participants have reported that their hope in life has been restored.

Regardless of their faith background, human services professionals serving the homeless population may consider incorporating religious resources in their work so they may enhance homeless persons' religiosity, which, in turn, might result in control over addictions, and restoration of hope. They should do it in such a way that their cultural competence is evident (Hodge, Moser, & Shafer, 2012).

As mental illness is one of the leading causes of homelessness, "mental health professionals [may be invited] to serve in consultative roles and offer specialized training to the staff members, many of whom may not be trained mental health professionals" (Moxley, Washington, & McElhaney, 2012, p. 443). Poverty, in general, is a contributing factor for homelessness. Since majority (61.4%) of the participants have reported that the organization of the present study has not helped them with employability, it is plausible that their overall happiness may be affected as a result. Faith-based organizations may "augment social services by collaborating with... organizations" (Moxley, Washington, & McElhaney, 2012, p. 443) so they are able to provide employment opportunities to homeless persons.

The limitations of the study are as follows: the sample size was small (N = 45); only one shelter was chosen; and there is no gender variation. Therefore, the study lacks generalizability. Future research should focus on larger sample size and should involve more shelters with gender variations. Future research should also involve qualitative analysis.

5. References

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