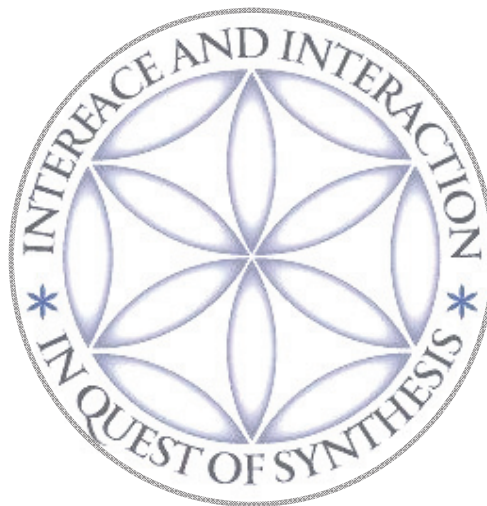




World Psychiatric Association

PLURALISM IN PSYCHIATRY

I. DIVERSE APPROACHES AND CONVERGING GOALS



Editors Constantin Soldatos
Pedro Ruiz
Dimitris Dikeos
Michelle Riba

MEDIMOND

INTERNATIONAL PROCEEDINGS

Religiosity Dimensions And Personality Traits In Greek Students

Kioulos K.T.¹, Bergiannaki J.D.¹, Glaros A.², Vassiliadou M.¹, Papadimitriou G.¹

¹ *1st Department of Psychiatry, University of Athens Medical School, Eginition Hospital, Athens, Greece*

² *Department of Social Theology, Faculty of Theology, University of Athens, Greece*

Summary

The quest for existential meaning constitutes a universal phenomenon traditionally manifested in official religions (religiosity) or personal modes of transcendence (spirituality). Religiosity and spirituality have been found to be associated with a variety of mental health and illness parameters. **Material and method:** 202 healthy students of the faculty of Theology of the University of Athens were interviewed using the Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality, which assesses the dimensions of “daily spiritual experiences”, “meaning”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “private religious practices”, “religious/spiritual coping”, “religious support”, “religious/spiritual history”, “commitment”, “organizational religiousness”, and “religious preferences”. The scale is “inverted” i.e. high scores in the dimensions of religiosity correspond to a low level of religiosity features. Specific personality traits (extraversion, neuroticism) were assessed by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to explore the association of continuous variables. Linear regression analyses were used to estimate the associations of neuroticism and extraversion with religiosity dimensions. **Results:** Neuroticism was positively correlated with the dimensions of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “private religious practices”, “religious support”, “religious/spiritual history”, and “organizational religiousness”. Extraversion was negatively correlated with the dimension scores of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “commitment”, “overall self-ranking”, and “meaning”. In the multiple linear regression analysis, neuroticism was associated with the dimension of “forgiveness”, whereas extraversion was associated with the dimensions of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “commitment”, “overall self-ranking” and “meaning”. **Conclusion:** Less daily spiritual experiences, values/beliefs, forgiveness, private religious practices, religious support, religious/spiritual history and organizational religiousness of the participants, correspond to higher scores in neuroticism, but these associations are not confirmed (except for forgiveness) lost linear regression was performed. On the contrary, more daily spiritual experiences, values/beliefs, commitment, overall self-ranking and meaning correspond consistently to higher scores in extraversion.

Introduction

Religion is an organized system of beliefs, practices, rituals and symbols designed a) to facilitate closeness to the sacred or transcendent (God, higher power, or ultimate truth/reality) and b) to foster an understanding of one's relationship and responsibility to others in living together in a community¹. Religiosity is defined as the level of involvement and the personal significance that the subject invests in a given religion; it, also, corresponds to a description of the extent and depth to which a person holds the beliefs of his/her religion². Spirituality is the personal quest for understanding answers to ultimate questions about life, meaning and relationship to the sacred or transcendent, which may (or may not) lead to or arise from the development of religious rituals and the formation of community¹.

Religion continues to play an important role in the lives of many people. Recent research suggests the presence of clinically important interactions between religious beliefs and mental health, although the exact nature of the associations remains unclear. Psychiatry has been biased against taking full account of this for many possible reasons, but this seems to be changing in the last decades³.

According to standard textbooks definitions, personality consists of a set of psychological features which display consistency across situations and stability over time. A lot of effort has been taken in order to identify specific personality characteristics related to religiosity. Eysenck's personality taxonomy (Psychoticism, Extraversion and Neuroticism) has been used almost exclusively in the psychology of religion⁴. The aim of the present study is to investigate specific personality traits in relation to specific dimensions of religiosity-

spirituality in Greek students, in order to extend the research base in this area to the Greek Christian Orthodox tradition.

Material and method

Our sample consisted of 202 healthy students attending the second year of the department of Social Theology of the University of Athens. They were interviewed using the Brief Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness/Spirituality (BMMRS), which assesses the dimensions of “daily spiritual experiences”, “meaning”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “private religious practices”, “religious/spiritual coping”, “religious support”, “religious/spiritual history”, “commitment”, “organizational religiousness”, and “religious preferences”⁵. A team of researchers supported by the Fetzer Institute and the National Institute on Aging has developed this questionnaire, which is one of the best-recognized in the field of health and religiosity. The questionnaire’s scores are “inverted”, i.e. high scores in the dimensions of religiosity correspond to a low level of religiosity features. The short version of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQ) was used for the assessment of personality traits and, more specifically, the dimensions of neuroticism and extraversion⁶.

Quantitative variables are presented with mean and standard deviation (SD). Qualitative variables are presented with absolute and relative frequencies. Pearson correlations coefficients were used to explore the association of two continuous variables. Linear regression analyses were used to estimate the associations of neuroticism and extraversion with religiosity dimensions after adjusting for sex, age, marital status, number of family members and place of birth. Each religiosity dimension was examined separately in the linear regression model, because model diagnostics with two or more dimensions in the models indicated that the regression estimates were highly collinear. Regression coefficients and standard errors were computed from the results of the linear regression analyses. All reported p values are two-tailed. Statistical significance was set at $p < 0.05$ and analyses were conducted using SPSS (version 19.0).

Results

The mean age of our sample was 22.5 years (SD=4.9 years); 71 of participants were men (35.1%) and 131 women (64.9%). Sample characteristics are presented in Table 1. Most of the participants lived with their family (74.3%) and 8.1% were married. Correlation coefficients of the Eysenck’s dimensions scores with religiosity dimensions are presented in Table 2. Neuroticism was positively correlated with the scores of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “private religious practices”, “religious support”, “religious/spiritual history” and “organizational religiousness”. Extraversion was negatively correlated with the scores of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “commitment”, “overall self-ranking” and “meaning”. When multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with neuroticism as dependent variable [Table 3] and after adjusting for sex, age, marital status, number of family members and place of birth, it was found that only the dimension of “forgiveness” was independently associated with neuroticism. Multiple regression analysis with extraversion as dependent variable [Table 4], showed that extraversion was associated with the dimensions of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “commitment”, “overall self-ranking” and “meaning”, after adjusting for demographics.

Table 1. Sample characteristics

	N(%)
Sex	
Women	131(64.9)
Men	71(35.1)
Age (years), mean±SD	22.5±4.9
Married	
No	170(91.9)
Yes	15(8.1)
Lives with:	
Alone	36(20.1)
Family	133(74.3)
Others	10(5.6)
Number of family members, mean±SD	4.4±1.3
Place of birth	
Greece-Urban	125(65.8)
Greece-Rural	51(26.8)
Other country	14(7.4)

Table 2. Pearson's correlation coefficients of EYSENCK scales scores with religiosity dimensions

Religiosity Dimensions	Neuroticism		Extraversion	
	r	p	r	p
Daily Spiritual Experiences	0.25	<0.001	-0.16	0.022
Values/Beliefs	0.15	0.041	-0.23	0.001
Forgiveness	0.28	<0.001	-0.17	0.020
Private Religious Practices	0.25	<0.001	-0.12	0.097
Religious/Spiritual Coping	-0.01	0.888	-0.07	0.298
Religious Support	0.15	0.036	-0.06	0.387
Religious/Spiritual History	0.18	0.012	-0.11	0.133
Commitment	0.12	0.086	-0.15	0.036
Organizational Religiousness	0.28	<0.001	-0.10	0.170
Overall Self- ranking	0.13	0.068	-0.21	0.002
Meaning	0.05	0.494	-0.23	0.001

Table 3. Multiple linear regression models: regression coefficients and standard errors for Neuroticism

	β_{\ddagger}	SE	P
Daily Spiritual Experiences	0.28	0.18	0.121
Values/Beliefs	0.50	0.35	0.146
Forgiveness	0.69	0.35	0.050
Private Religious Practices	0.22	0.14	0.137
Religious/Spiritual Coping	0.36	0.41	0.380
Religious Support	0.26	0.26	0.324
Religious/Spiritual History	1.12	0.64	0.080
Commitment	0.31	0.28	0.272
Organizational Religiousness	0.22	0.17	0.188
Overall Self- ranking	0.26	0.29	0.376
Meaning	0.05	0.28	0.863

\ddagger adjusted for sex, age, marital status, number of family members and place of birth

Table 4. Multiple linear regression models: regression coefficients and standard errors for Extraversion

	β ‡	SE	P
Daily Spiritual Experiences	-0.23	0.10	0.019
Values/Beliefs	-0.58	0.18	0.002
Forgiveness	-0.33	0.19	0.081
Private Religious Practices	-0.15	0.08	0.059
Religious/Spiritual Coping	-0.33	0.22	0.136
Religious Support	-0.14	0.14	0.334
Religious/Spiritual History	-0.60	0.34	0.084
Commitment	-0.36	0.15	0.018
Organizational Religiousness	-0.14	0.09	0.132
Overall Self- ranking	-0.46	0.15	0.003
Meaning	-0.49	0.14	0.001

‡ adjusted for sex, age, marital status, number of family members and place of birth

Discussion

In order to comprehend the above findings it is essential to have in mind that high scores in the dimensions of religiosity corresponded to a low level of religiosity. There were two noteworthy findings from the present data set. First, neuroticism was positively correlated with several scores (i.e. it was negatively correlated with the religiosity dimensions) such as “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “private religious practices”, “religious support”, “religious/spiritual history” and “organizational religiousness”, although in the multiple linear regression analysis only the “forgiveness” dimension remained marginally statistically significantly associated with neuroticism. Second, extraversion was negatively correlated with the scores (i.e. positively correlated with the dimensions) of “daily spiritual experiences”, “values/beliefs”, “forgiveness”, “commitment”, “overall self- ranking” and “meaning”; in multiple linear regression analysis all these dimensions except forgiveness remained statistically significantly associated with extraversion.

Most studies concerning the relationship between personality and religion have been conducted within Eysenck’s framework of the three dimensions of extraversion, neuroticism, and psychoticism. Several researchers have concluded that scores recorded on indices of religiosity were inversely related to psychoticism scores, this being independent of both extraversion scores and neuroticism scores⁷⁻⁹. It is presumably for this reason that there is little or no discussion of personality and religion in most recent textbooks on the psychology of religion¹⁰.

Compared to introverts, extraverted individuals have a naturally lower arousal level, which causes them to seek stimulation. By contrast, due to their naturally high arousal level, introverted individuals seek the minimum level of stimulation. This is why introverts have a tendency for quiet activities whereas extraverts tend to like stimulating activities. Individuals high in neuroticism, on the other hand, display emotional instability owing to their tendency for a highly reactive autonomic nervous system. By contrast, the autonomic nervous systems of individuals who are low in neuroticism are not very reactive, and these individuals are therefore more emotionally stable. In other words, extraversion contains sociable and impulsive components, whereas neuroticism is related to emotional instability, including anxiety, depression, low self-esteem and tension¹¹.

Contrary to the idea that religion is unrelated to neuroticism and extraversion, a meta-analytic review demonstrated that religion is related to these factors; the relationship, however, depends clearly on the religious dimension measured¹².

Our findings support that religious/spiritual are associated mainly with extraversion; further investigation, however, could demonstrate possible interactions between personality and spirituality, as well as the way in which personality and situational factors might co-determine religiosity on an individual level.

Approval has been obtained by the authors’ Institutional Review Committee for data retrieval and their publication.

References

1. KOENIG HG., MCCULLOUGH ME., LARSON DB. (2001). Handbook of Religion and Health. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 18.

2. MEADOR KG., KOENIG HG. Spirituality and religion in psychiatric practice: Parameters and implications. *Psychiatr Annals* 30:549–555, 2000.
3. NEELEMAN J., PERSAUD R. Why do psychiatrists neglect religion? *Br J Med Psychology* 68:169-178, 1995.
4. SAROGLU V., JASPARD JM. Personality and Religion: From Eysenck's Taxonomy to the Five-Factor Model. *Archiv fur Religionpsychologie* 23:41–70, 2000.
5. FETZER INSTITUTE, National Institute on Aging Working Group. (2003). *Multidimensional Measurement of Religiousness, Spirituality for Use in Health Research. A Report of a National Working Group.* Supported by the Fetzer Institute in Collaboration with the National Institute on Aging. Kalamazoo, MI: Fetzer Institute.
6. EYSENCK HJ., EYSENCK S.BG. (1992). *Manual for the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised.* San Diego, CA: Educational and Industrial Testing Service.
7. BEIT-HALLAHMI B., ARGYLE M. (1997). *The psychology of religious belief and experience.* London: Routledge.
8. LEWIS CA., MALTBY J. Religiosity and personality among USA adults. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 18:293-295, 1995.
9. MALTBY J. Personality and correlates of religiosity among adults in the Republic of Ireland. *Psychological Reports*, 81:827-831, 1997.
10. EYSENCK MW. (1998). Personality and the psychology of religion. *Mental Health, Religion & Culture* 1(1):11-19, 1998.
11. EYSENCK H.J. (1990). Biological dimensions of personality. In L. A. Pervin (Ed.), *Handbook of personality: Theory and research.* New York: Guilford Press, pp. 244–276.
12. SAROGLU V. Religion and the five factors of personality: a meta-analytic review. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 32:15-25, 2002.