



Institute for
the **Impact** of
Faith in Life

Keep the Faith: Mental Health in the UK

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The Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life

The Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL) is a research forum that examines the role that faith and religious belief plays in the lives of people in the U.K., whether at work, at home or in the community.

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Executive Summary

The newly-created Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL) commissioned a nationally representative survey of 2,004 UK adult respondents which explored the relationship between faith and mental health. Conducted by British Polling Council (BPC) member TechnéUK between 29 September – 8 October 2023, the results suggest that there is a positive relationship between levels of religiosity and self-reported mental health in the UK:

Psychological Well-Being

- Among those who reported that their religious background is important to their personal identity, 73% said that their psychological well-being was in generally good condition over the three months leading up to the survey. This drops to 55% - a difference of 18 percentage points - for those who said their religious background was unimportant to their personal identity.
- Among UK respondents with a self-declared religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist), seven in ten (70%) said that their psychological well-being was in good shape over the three months leading up to the survey. For atheists, under half - 49% - said that it was in good shape.

Happiness

- Among those who reported that their religious background is important to their personal identity, over three in four said they were happy as a person (76%). This drops to 58% for those who said that their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity.
- Among those with a stated religious affiliation, over seven in ten (74%) said that they were happy as a person (with 9% saying they were unhappy). For atheists, 52% said that they were happy, with nearly a quarter - 24% - saying that they were unhappy.

Resilience

- Among those who reported that their religious background is important to their personal identity, over three in four said they were confident over handling the challenges that come with life (76%), with 7% saying they are unconfident.
- For those who say their religious background is not important to their personal identity, 63% report being confident over handling the challenges that come with life, with nearly one in five - 19% - saying they are unconfident.
- Among those with a stated religious affiliation, over seven in ten (74%) said that they were confident over dealing with the challenges that come with life (with 8% saying they were unconfident). For atheists, 56% said that they were confident, with nearly a quarter - 24% - saying that they were unconfident.

Self-control

- Among those who reported that their religious background is important to their personal identity, 74% said that they had a high level of self-control in their everyday life, with 6% saying they had a low level of self-control.
- For those who stated that their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, 57% said they had a high level of self-control in their everyday life, with nearly one in six - 16% - saying they had a low level of self-control.
- Among those with a stated religious affiliation, seven in ten – 70% - said that they have a high level of self-control in everyday life (with 7% saying that they have a low level of self-control). For atheists, 51% said it is high, with one in five - 20% - saying it is low.

Optimism

- Among those who reported that their religious background is important to their personal identity, 69% said that they were optimistic over their own future, with 10% saying they were pessimistic.
- For those who said their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, under half - 48% - said they were optimistic over their own future. Over a quarter – 27% - said they were pessimistic.
- Among those with a stated religious affiliation, 65% said they were optimistic over their own future (with 12% saying that they were pessimistic). For atheists, 42% reported being optimistic, with three in ten - 30% - saying they were pessimistic.

Life satisfaction

- Among those who reported that their religious background is important to their personal identity, over three in four said they were satisfied with their life (76%). This drops to 61% for those who said their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity. In the former group, 8% reported being dissatisfied with their life – rising to 23% for the latter group.
- Among those with a stated religious affiliation, 74% reported life satisfaction (with 9% saying that they were dissatisfied with life). For atheists, 53% reported life satisfaction, with over a quarter – 26% - saying they were dissatisfied with life. For agnostics, 62% reported life satisfaction, with 23% saying they were dissatisfied with life.

1. Introduction

The UK has experienced significant forms of social and cultural change over the course of the 21st Century. In the most recent 2021 England & Wales Census, under half of those living in the two home nations identified as Christian – 46.2%¹ – for the first time in the history of the Census, a sharp drop from the figure of 71.7% in 2001 – a fall of more than 25 percentage points in the space of just two decades. Further highlighting this process of rapid mainstream secularisation, from 2011 to 2021, the proportion of people who state that they have “no religion” has increased from 25.2% to 37.2% – a full 12 percentage points.²

But as well as becoming more secular, our society has also become a more religiously heterogeneous one. The unquestionable decline of Christianity has been accompanied by the growth of non-Christian minorities as proportions of the population. According to the latest edition of the England & Wales Census, 6.5% of residents identify as Muslim – 3.9 million people.³ This has increased from the 2011 Census figure of 4.9% – 2.7 million people. In another landmark moment for the England & Wales Census, the number of Hindus hit the one million mark for the first time – representing 1.7% of the population. The two home nations are home to over half a million Sikhs (524,000 according to the 2021 Census), as well as over a quarter of a million Buddhists and Jews (273,000 and 271,000 residents respectively).⁴

The UK’s ever-changing portrait means the role of faith, religion, and spirituality should form a larger part of our national socio-political discourse. Both high-speed secularisation and notable levels of religious diversification can have an impact in various spheres of British life – one being mental health and psychological well-being. Following the social disruption and economic trauma that came with the Covid-19 pandemic and associated lockdown policies, the UK was engulfed by a cost-of-living crisis which is proving itself to have a disproportionate financial impact on younger families and those with disabilities. Fundamentally intertwined socio-economic difficulties and public-health emergencies bring about serious challenges and pressures which can be incredibly testing in terms of mental health and psychological well-being in the UK.

While much of the focus on the UK’s mental health challenges has understandably honed in on state capacity – especially under-funded and under-resourced services being unable to keep pace with the growth in need for such treatment – there is also a case for exploring the impact of socio-cultural changes which have potentially made the UK more mentally vulnerable and psychologically exposed to admittedly traumatic phenomena such as the Covid-19 pandemic and the ongoing cost-of-living crisis. Has the rapid secularisation of the British mainstream served our society well in terms of dealing with the challenges and pressures of the volatile and unpredictable modern world? Have increased levels of

1 Office for National Statistics (2022), ‘Religion, England and Wales: Census 2021’, 29 November. Available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/culturalidentity/religion/bulletins/religionenglandandwales/census2021>, last accessed: 20 October 2023.

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

'godlessness' and atheistic tendencies fostered a British society with a liberating sense of autonomy and enhanced self-control? Or is it the case that stronger forms of divine attachment and higher degrees of religiosity provide the grounding and rootedness for greater mental stability, emotional security, and psychological resilience in the UK?

The focus of this data-driven report published by the newly-created Institute for the Impact of Faith in Life (IIFL) explores the relationship between faith and mental health in the UK. The report is structured as follows. After this introduction, Section 2 of the report focuses on existing studies and literature on the relationship between faith and mental health (including the impact of religion in psychological well-being). The report then provides data analysis which is reliant on the fresh UK-wide survey conducted by TechneUK, exploring these various inter-relationships of interest. The report concludes with a discussion of the results and how the role of religion and spirituality should be viewed moving forwards in the sphere of mental health and psychological well-being in modern-day Britain.



2. Faith, Religion, and Spirituality in the Context of Mental Health

The role of faith and spirituality in the context of mental health and psychological well-being is one that continues to be the subject of much contestation – especially in academic spheres which are uncompromising in terms of their commitment to scientific rationality and scepticism of perceived unfounded beliefs.⁵ This is reflective of the fact that Western psychologists are traditionally less likely to be religious and hold spiritual beliefs when compared with their own general populations.⁶ Therefore, it is plausible that there is an ideological bias in relevant academic fields which contributes towards a reluctance to explore the potentially positive impact of faith and religious grounding on mental health and psychological well-being outcomes.

However, there is an ever-growing wealth of research which suggests that there is a positive role played by faith, religion, and spirituality in the sphere of mental health and psychological well-being – especially in the United States, where Christianity continues to play a major role in political discourse and wider public life (particularly when compared to the United Kingdom). One argument which has been put forward is that religion can foster positive forms of psychological well-being as it can encourage supernatural beliefs which act as stress-coping mechanisms.⁷ In social psychology, a perceived connection with the divine has been identified as having a ‘stress-buffering’ function to help manage the challenges and difficulties that come with life.⁸ This strand of literature has grown significantly since the early stages of the Covid-19 pandemic. This has included a 2020 paper by Professor Harold Koenig, in which the American psychiatrist asserts that “religious faith is an important resource for health and well-being” and that spiritual health is “closely related to both mental and physical health”.⁹ A more recent 2022 study focusing on the nursing profession in the southeastern region of the United States found that “a path analysis supported a model in which, through its positive impact on mental well-being, religion/spirituality was negatively associated with emotional exhaustion and depersonalization”.¹⁰

5 Gergen, K. J. (2009). The problem of prejudice in plural worlds. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology*, 29(2), 97–101.

6 Shafranske, E. P., & Cummings, J. P. (2013). Religious and spiritual beliefs, affiliations, and practices of psychologists. In K. I. Pargament (Ed.), *APA handbook of psychology, religion, and spirituality* (Vol. 2, pp. 23–41).

7 Aneshensel, C. S., Phelan, J. C., & Bierman, A. (Eds.). (2013). *Handbook of the sociology of mental health* (2nd ed.), New York, Springer.

8 Ibid.

9 Koenig, H. (2020), Maintaining Health and Well-Being by Putting Faith into Action During the COVID-19 Pandemic, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 59: 2205-2214. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-020-01035-2>, last accessed: 24 October 2023.

10 Harris, S. and Tao, H. (2022), ‘The Impact of US Nurses’ Personal Religious and Spiritual Beliefs on Their Mental Well-Being and Burnout: A Path Analysis’, *Journal of Religion and Health*, 61: 1772-1791. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10943-021-01203-y>, last accessed: 24 October 2023.

Institutions such as the Pew Research Centre have published multi-country research which explores the relationship between faith and happiness – reporting positive associations. Pew analysis has found that across the host of countries over several continents, “regular participation in a religious community clearly is linked with higher levels of happiness and civic engagement (specifically, voting in elections and joining community groups or other voluntary organisations)”.¹¹ This ties in with traditional literature on “social capital” published by political scientists such as Robert Putnam, which advances the view that membership of friendship networks cultivated by religious communities does not only provide a sense of belonging and purpose, but also creates job opportunities which offer a path towards wealth accumulation.¹²

In the British context, there has been a burgeoning strand of research which suggests that there is a positive relationship between religious participation and well-being. Analysis using Understanding Society data has shown that “attending religious services may be good for mental wellbeing, with possible implications for future efforts to improve the population’s mental health”.¹³ However, the authors of the research Ozan Aksoy and David Bann also warn that religion has the potential to “ostracise people from some social activities in secular contexts and increase people’s feelings of guilt”.¹⁴ Indeed, there is research in the British context which has found that higher subjective importance of religion was associated with lower mental well-being (based on General Health Questionnaire data).¹⁵

However, it is worth noting that there have been recent survey results which have countered these findings. A nationally-representative UK poll conducted in January 2021 by ICM Unlimited delivered relevant findings surrounding life satisfaction – a key measure of subjective well-being which can incorporate perceptions of the quality of key social relationships, the concept of self-actualisation and one’s view of their own ability to cope with day-to-day challenges and pressures. In this ICM Unlimited survey, respondents who said that their religious identity was an important part of their personal identity were notably more likely to report life satisfaction – a key measure of subjective well-being – than those who said it was unimportant to their personal identity. This pattern is replicated in terms of whether the respondent in the ICM Unlimited poll had a clear religious affiliation – with those in the “no religion category” notably less likely to report being satisfied with their life.

11 Pew Research Centre (2019), ‘Religion’s Relationship to Happiness, Civic Engagement and Health Around the World’, 31 January. Available at: <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2019/01/31/religions-relationship-to-happiness-civic-engagement-and-health-around-the-world/>, last accessed: 24 October 2023.

12 Putnam, R. (2000), *Bowling alone: The collapse and revival of American community*, New York, Simon & Schuster.

13 Aksoy, O. and Bann, D. (2021), ‘Does religion matter for well-being?’, *Understanding Society Blog*, 22 September. Available at: <https://www.understandingsociety.ac.uk/blog/2021/09/22/does-religion-matter-for-wellbeing>, last accessed: 25 October 2023.

14 Ibid.

15 Aksoy, O., Bann, D., Fluharty, M. and Nandi, A. (2022), ‘Religiosity and Mental Wellbeing Among Members of Majority and Minority Religions: Findings from Understanding Society: the UK Household Longitudinal Study’, *American Journal of Epidemiology*, 191(1): 20-30. Available at: <https://academic.oup.com/aje/article/191/1/20/6274218>, last accessed: 25 October 2023.

Considering the relatively underdeveloped nature of British research on the role of faith, religion, and spirituality in the context of mental health and the mixed nature of findings focused on this association, there is a clear need for an in-depth, fuller-scale quantitative study using fresh nationally-representative survey data.



3. Survey Methodology and Data Analysis

The IIFL commissioned a bespoke nationally-representative survey of 2,004 adult respondents in the UK which was carried out by TechneUK (which is a member of the British Polling Council [BPC]). Covering all four home nations (England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland), the survey methodology was a mixture of online and phone interviews, with the fieldwork taking place between 29 September – 8 October 2023. The central purpose of commissioning the survey was to take a quantitative methodological approach to investigating the role and impact of faith, religion, and spirituality in daily life, with particular considerations given to mental health and psychological well-being.

Figure 1: Importance of religious background to v identity

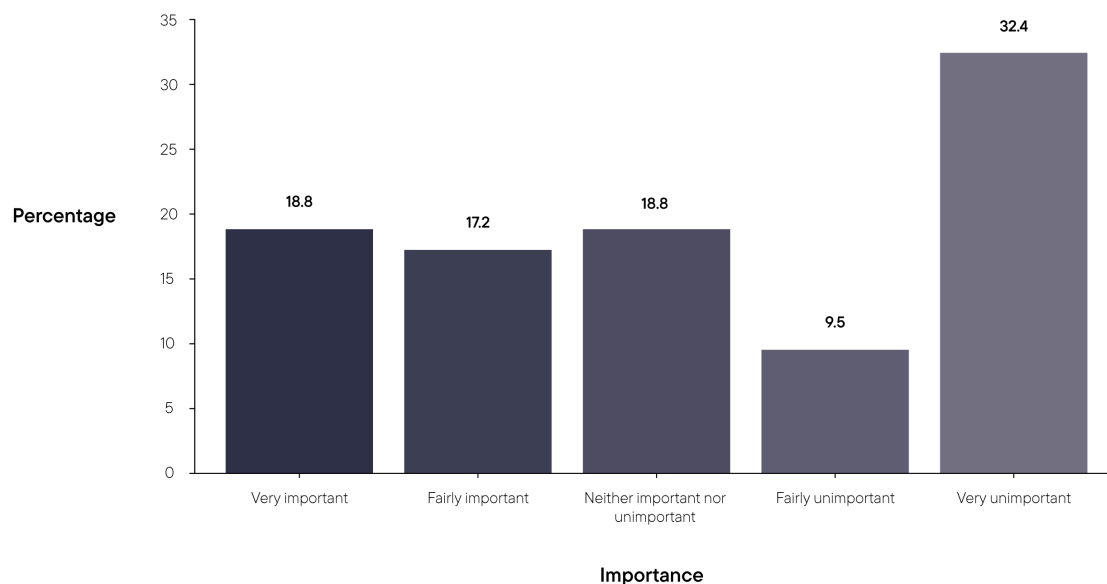


Figure 1 presents an overview of the survey responses to the question of how important one felt their religious background was to their personal identity. The data shows that 36% of UK respondents stated that their religious background was important to their personal identity (18.8% reporting “very important”, with a further 17.2% saying it is “fairly important”). While 18.8% stated that their religious background was neither important nor unimportant to their personal identity, more than two in five respondents – 42% – consider it to be unimportant (with nearly one in three saying that it is “very unimportant” – 32.4%).¹⁶

¹⁶ For this survey item, 3.2% of respondents chose the “not sure/don’t know” option (this is not shown on Figure 1).

Figure 2: strength of attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s

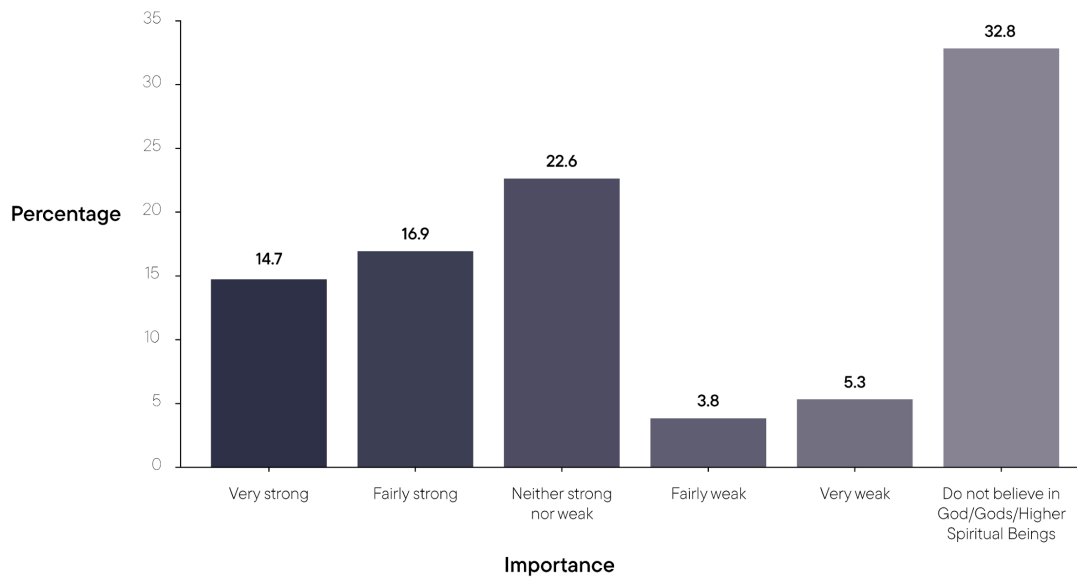


Figure 2 presents the survey results for the self-reported strength of attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s among the UK respondents. Over three in ten respondents reported having either a “very strong” or “fairly strong” attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s – a total of 31.6%. Over one in five respondents said that their attachment was neither strong nor weak – 22.6%. While 3.8% reported a “fairly weak” attachment, 5.3% stated that theirs was a “very weak” one – a total of 9.1%. Nearly one in three respondents – 32.8% – declared that they do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s (the modal response for this survey item).¹⁷ This nestles in with the fact that 32.4% of respondents felt their religious background was unimportant to their personal identity (Figure 1).

¹⁷ For this survey item, 4.0% of respondents chose the “not sure/don’t know” option (this is not shown on Figure 2).

Figure 3: Importance of religious background to personal identity x psychological well-being

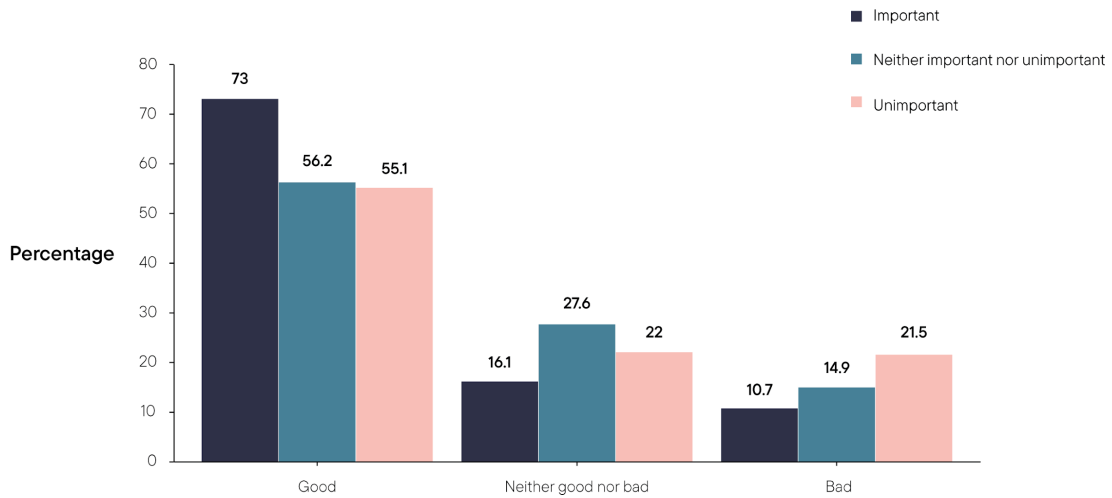


Figure 3 presents the survey data results for the bivariate relationship between the importance of religious background to personal identity and self-reported level of psychological well-being.¹⁸

Among those who stated that their religious background is important to their personal identity, nearly three in four – 73% – said that their psychological well-being in the three months leading up to the survey was good overall. This drops to 56.2% for those who feel their religious background is neither important nor unimportant to their personal identity, and further reduces to 55.1% for respondents who said it is unimportant.

The data also shows that among those who said their religious background was important to their personal identity, around one in ten – 10.7% – reported that their psychological well-being was generally bad in the three months leading up to them taking the survey. This rises to 14.9% for those who said it was neither important nor unimportant. Among those who said that their religious background was unimportant to their personal identity, more than one in five reported that their psychological well-being was bad overall – 21.5%.

¹⁸ Cases of “don’t know/not sure” responses for both variables were included in the analysis but not shown in Figure 3.

Figure 4: Strength of divine/spiritual attachment x psychological well-being

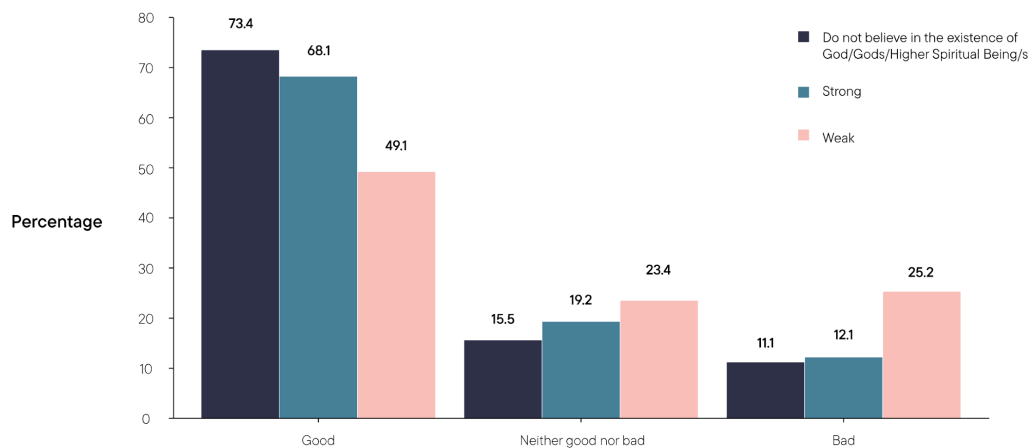


Figure 4 presents an overview of the bivariate relationship of divine/spiritual attachment and self-reported level of psychological well-being. The data suggests that stronger forms of divine and spiritual attachment are associated with good psychological well-being.

Among those who say they possess a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, nearly three in four people report having a good level of psychological well-being in the three months preceding their taking of the survey – 73.4%. This drops to 68.1% among those who say that they have a weak divine/spiritual attachment. When it comes to respondents who do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, under half – 49.1% – said their level of psychological well-being was good overall.

For respondents who reported a strong level of divine/spiritual attachment, 11.1% stated that their psychological well-being was generally bad in the three months leading up to the survey. This rises marginally to 12.1% among those surveyed who stated that their attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s is weak. Among those who stated that they do not believe in the existence of divine power/s and higher spiritual being/s, more than a quarter said that their psychological well-being was bad overall – 25.2%

Figure 5: Religious affiliation x psychological well-being

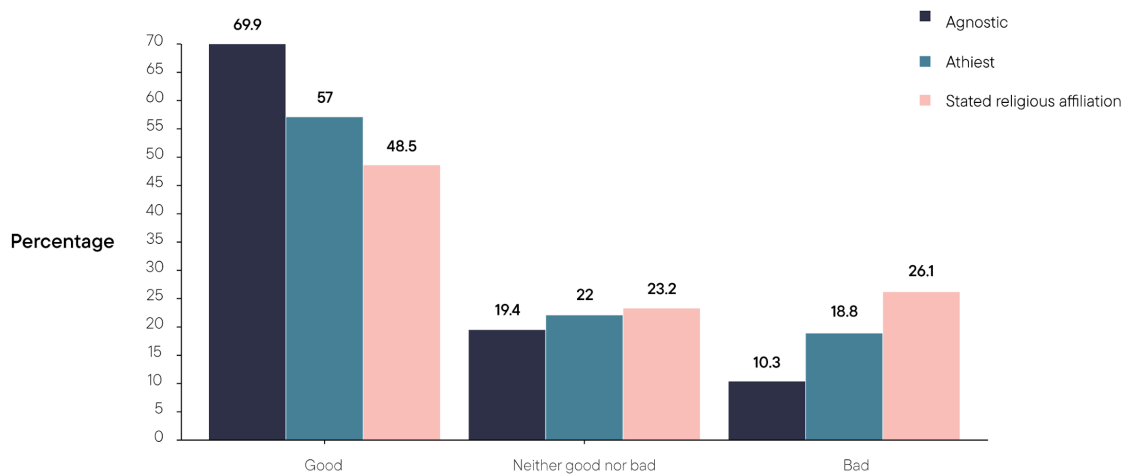


Figure 5 presents an overview of the bivariate relationship between religious affiliation and self-reported level of psychological well-being. Three types of religious affiliation are included in the analysis: “stated religious affiliation” (which collectively includes all respondents who identified as one of the following: Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist and Jewish); agnostic; and atheist.

The data shows that among those with a stated religious affiliation, seven in ten respondents felt that their level of psychological well-being was good overall in the three months leading up to taking the survey – 69.9%. This drops to 57% for those who consider themselves to be agnostic and further down to under half – 48.5% - for atheist respondents. There is a difference of more than 21 percentage points between those with a self-declared religious affiliation and atheists when it comes to self-reporting a good level of psychological well-being.

Among those who affiliate themselves with Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism or Judaism, one in ten reported that their psychological well-being was generally bad in the three-month period preceding the survey – 10.3%. This rises to nearly one in five – 18.8% - among those who identify as agnostic. Among respondents who declared themselves as atheists, more than a quarter reported that their psychological well-being was bad overall during the three months leading up to being polled for this survey – 26.1%.

Figure 6: Importance of religious background, divine/spiritual attachment, religious status x happiness

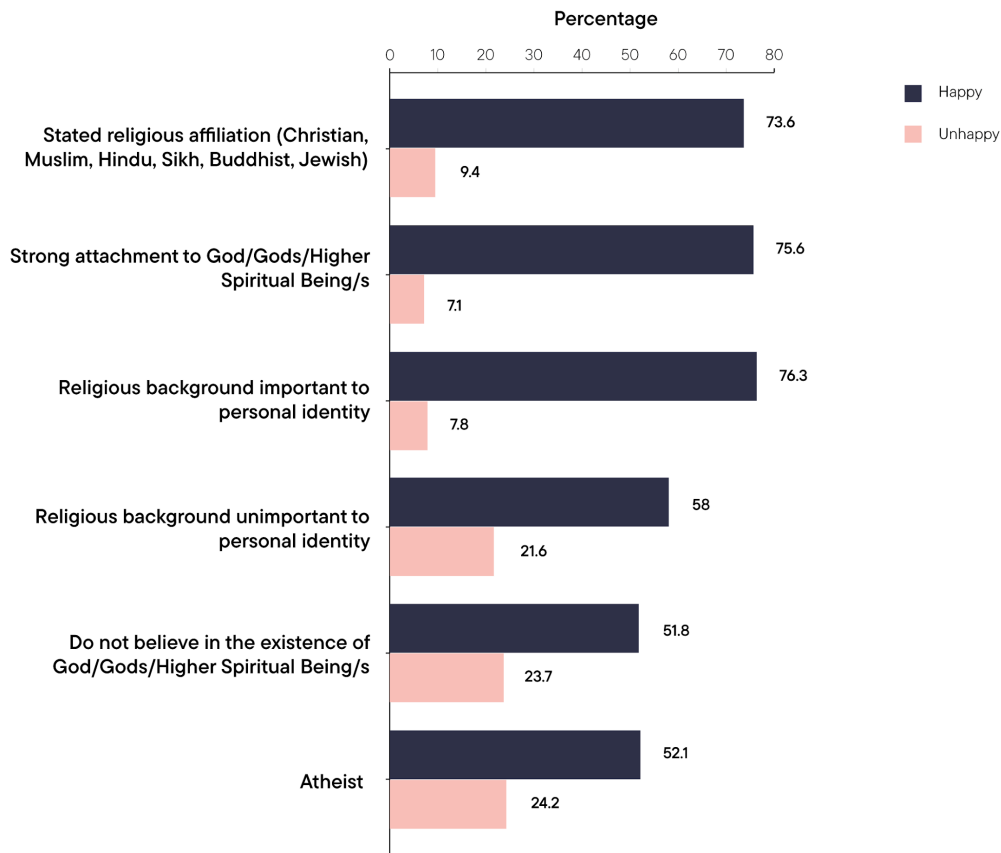


Figure 6 presents an overview of three bivariate relationships: importance of religious background to personal identity and happiness; strength of divine/spiritual attachment and happiness; and religious affiliation/status and happiness.

Among those who state that their religious background is important to their personal identity, over three in four consider themselves to be a happy person – 76.3%. This drops down by more than 18 percentage points among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity – 58%. In the former group, 7.8% say they are unhappy as a person. Among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, more than one in five say they are unhappy as a person – 21.6%

For respondents who report having a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, more than three in four say they are happy as a person – 75.6%. This drops by nearly 24 percentage points among those who do not believe in the existence of such divine/spiritual power/s – 51.8%. In the former group, 7.1% consider themselves to be unhappy as a person. This rises to nearly one in four – 23.7% - among those who do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s.

When it comes to religious affiliation/status, among those who have a defined religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish), nearly three in four consider themselves to be happy as a person – 73.6%. Among those who self-identify as atheist, this

figure drops by 21.5 percentage points to 52.1%. In the former group of respondents with a defined religious affiliation, 9.4% report being unhappy as a person. This rises to nearly one in four among atheist respondents – 24.2%.

Figure 7: Importance of religious background, divine/spiritual attachment, religious status x confidence over handling life's challenges

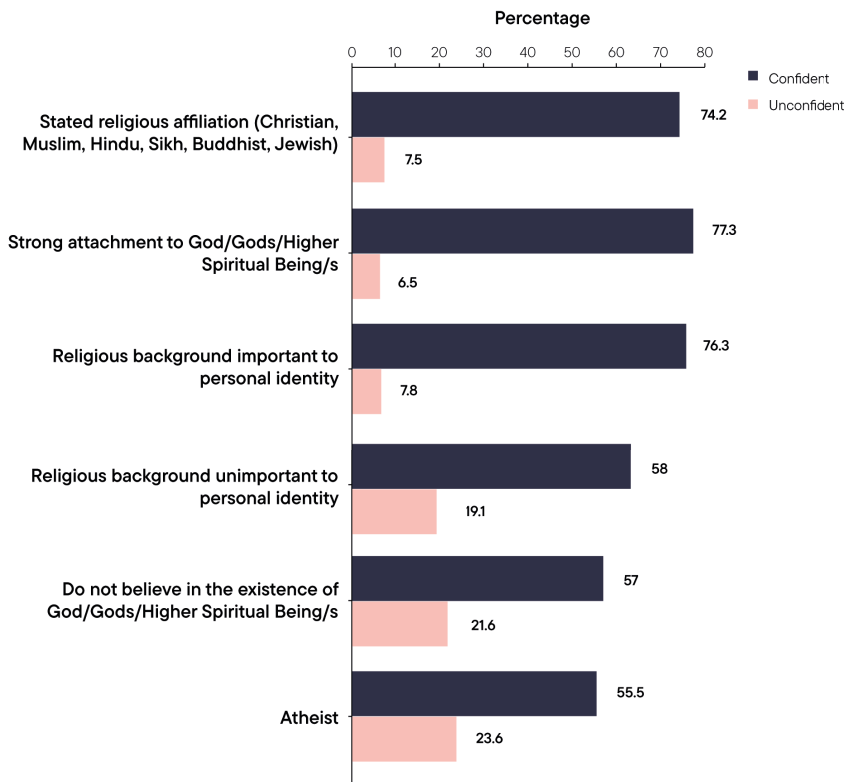


Figure 7 presents an overview of three bivariate relationships: importance of religious background to personal identity and confidence over handling the challenges that come with life; strength of divine/spiritual attachment and confidence over handling the challenges that come with life; and religious affiliation/status and confidence over handling the challenges that come with life. This essentially explores the relationship between religiosity and resilience at the bivariate level.

Among those who state that their religious background is important to their personal identity, over three in four stated that they were confident over handling the challenges that come with life – 75.7%. This drops down by 12.5 percentage points among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity – 63.2%. In the former group, 6.8% say they are unconfident over handling life’s challenges as a person. Among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, this rises to nearly one in five respondents – 19.1%

For respondents who report having a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, more than three in four say they are confident over handling the challenges of life – 77.3%. This drops by 20 percentage points among those who do not believe in the existence of such divine/spiritual power/s – 57%. In the former group, 6.5% say they are unconfident over

handling life's challenges. This rises to over one in five – 21.6% – among those who do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s.

When it comes to religious affiliation/status, among those who have a defined religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish), nearly three in four state that they are confident when it comes to handling the challenges of life – 74.2%. Among those who self-identify as atheist, this figure drops to 55.5%. In the former group of respondents with a defined religious affiliation, 7.5% report being unconfident over handling life's challenges. This rises to nearly one in four among atheist respondents – 23.6%.

Figure 8: Importance of religious background, divine/spiritual attachment, religious status x self-reported level of self-control

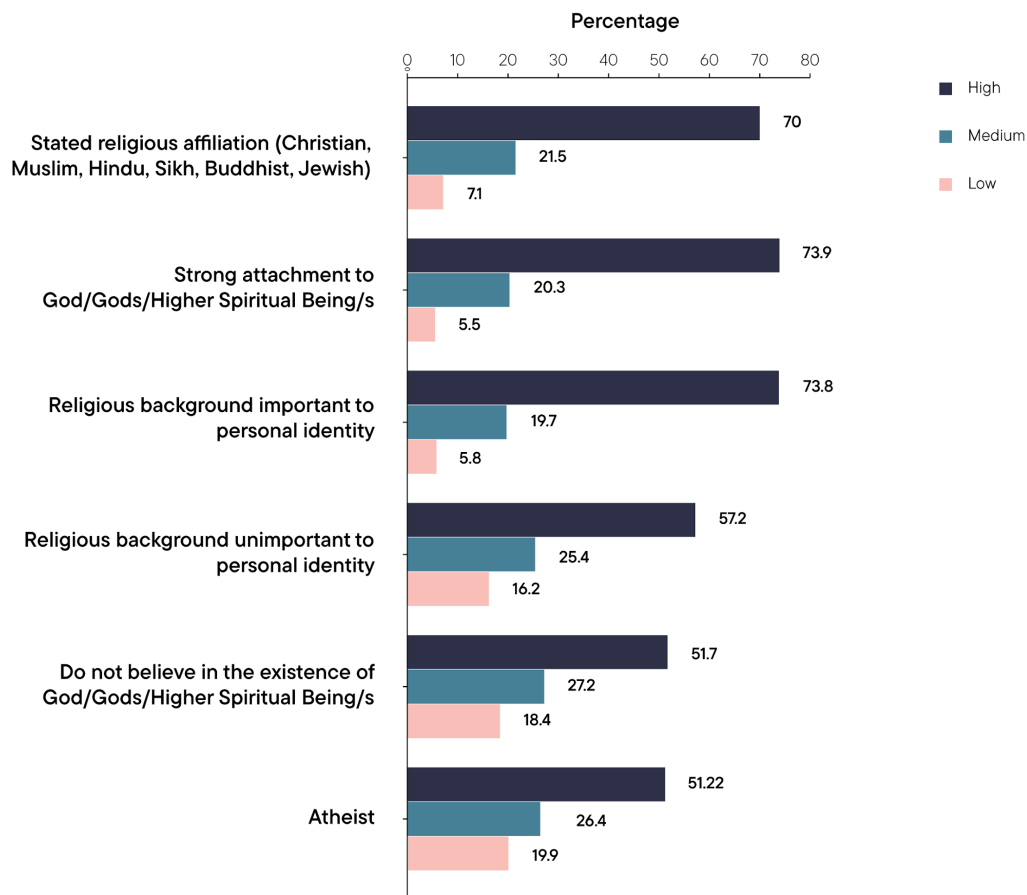


Figure 8 presents an overview of three bivariate relationships: importance of religious background to personal identity and confidence and self-reported level of self-control in day-to-day life; strength of divine/spiritual attachment and self-reported level of self-control in day-to-day life; and religious affiliation/status and self-reported level of self-control in day-to-day life. Three levels of self-control are included in the analysis: high, medium, and low.

Among those who state that their religious background is important to their personal identity, nearly three in four stated that their level of self-control is high in their day-to-day life – 73.8%. This drops down by 16.6 percentage points among those who say their religious background

is unimportant to their personal identity – 57.2%. In the former group, 5.8% say they have a low level of self-control in their everyday life. Among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, this rises to 16.2%.

For respondents who report having a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, around three in four respondents say that their day-to-day level of self-control is high overall – 73.9%. This drops by 22 percentage points among those who do not believe in the existence of such divine/spiritual power/s – 51.7%. In the former group, 5.5% feel that they have a low level of self-control in their day-to-day life. This rises by more than three-fold – 18.4% – among those who do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s.

When it comes to religious affiliation/status, among those who have a defined religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish), seven in ten are of the view that they have a high level of self-control in their day-to-day life – exactly 70%. Among those who self-identify as atheist, this figure drops by nearly 19 percentage points to 51.2%. In the former group of respondents with a defined religious affiliation, 7.1% feel that their day-to-day level of self-control is low overall. This rises to one in five among atheist respondents – 19.9% to be exact.

Figure 9: Importance of religious background, divine/spiritual attachment, religious status x personal optimism

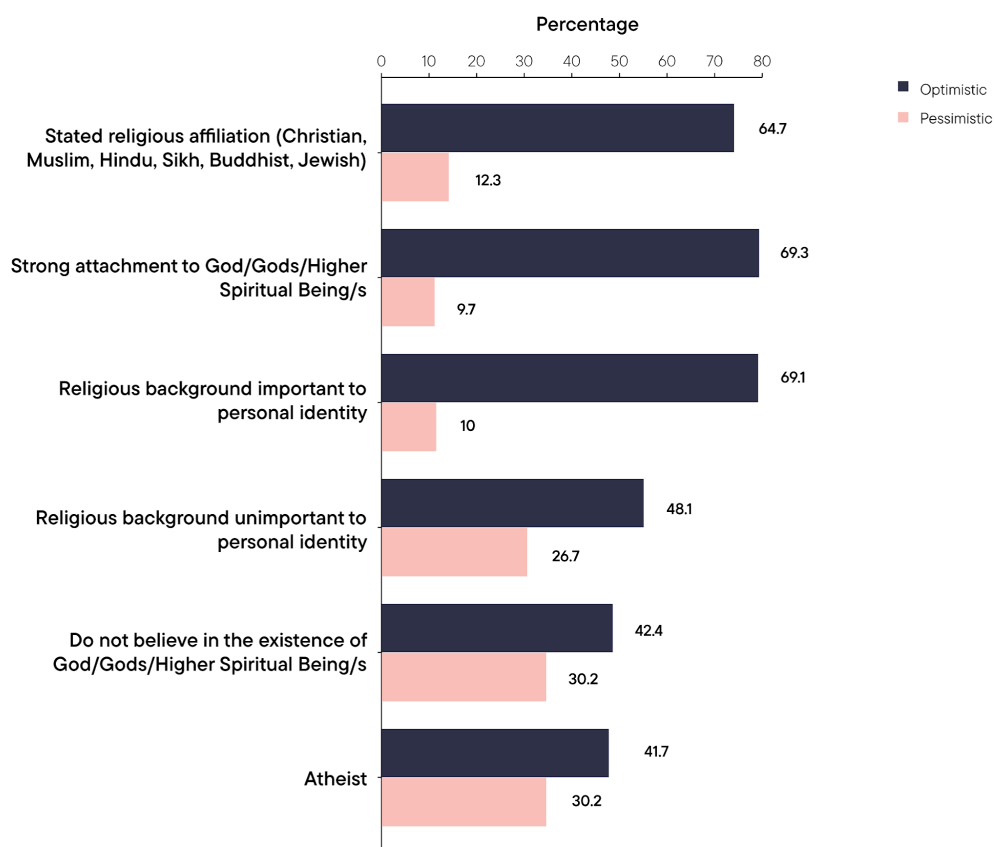


Figure 9 presents an overview of three bivariate relationships: importance of religious background to personal identity and confidence and optimism over one’s own future; strength

of divine/spiritual attachment and optimism over one’s own future; and religious affiliation/status and optimism over one’s own future.

Among those who state that their religious background is important to their personal identity, nearly seven in ten say that they are optimistic over their future – 69.1%. This drops down by 21 percentage points among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity – 48.1%. In the former group, one in ten say they are pessimistic over their own future – exactly 10%. Among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, this rises to more than a quarter of respondents – 26.7%.

For respondents who report having a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, around seven in ten respondents say that they are optimistic over their own future – 69.3%. This drops by 27 percentage points among those who do not believe in the existence of such divine/spiritual power/s – 42.4%. In the former group, under one in ten state that they are pessimistic over their own future – 9.7%. This rises to more than three in ten – 30.2% - among those who do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s.

When it comes to religious affiliation/status, among those who have a defined religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish), 64.7% say that they are optimistic over their own future. Among those who self-identify as atheist, this figure drops by exactly 23 percentage points to 41.7%. In the former group of respondents with a defined religious affiliation, 12.3% feel pessimistic over their own future. This rises to more than three in ten among atheist respondents – 30.2%.

Figure 10: Importance of religious background, divine/spiritual attachment, religious status x life satisfaction

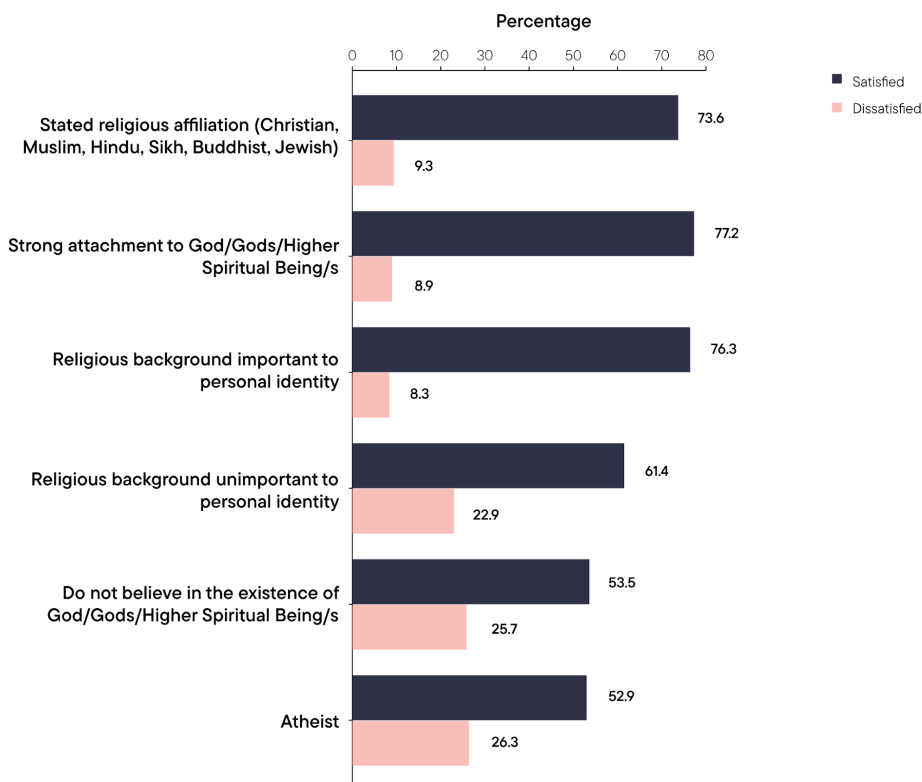


Figure 10 presents an overview of three bivariate relationships: importance of religious background to personal identity and confidence and life satisfaction; strength of divine/spiritual attachment and life satisfaction; and religious affiliation/status and life satisfaction.

Among those who state that their religious background is important to their personal identity, more than three in four respondents say that they are satisfied with their life – 76.3%. This drops down by 15 percentage points among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity – 61.4%. In the former group, 8.3% report being dissatisfied with their own life. Among those who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity, the level of life dissatisfaction rises to 22.9%.

For respondents who report having a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s, more than three in four respondents say they are satisfied with their life – 77.2%. This drops by 23.7 percentage points among those who do not believe in the existence of such divine/spiritual power/s – 53.5%. In the former group, under one in ten respondents report being dissatisfied with their own life – 8.9%. This rises to more than one in four – 25.7% - among those who do not believe in the existence of God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Being/s.

When it comes to religious affiliation/status, among those who have a defined religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish), around three in four respondents report life satisfaction – 73.6%. Among those who self-identify as atheist, this figure drops to 52.9%. In the former group of respondents with a defined religious affiliation, under one in ten say they are dissatisfied with their own life – 9.3%. This rises to more than one in four among atheist respondents – 26.3%.



Table 1: Level of Attendance for Religious Services x Psychological Well-Being; Happiness; Resilience; Self-Control; Optimism; Life Satisfaction

	At least weekly (%)	Occasionally (%)	Never attend (%)
Good level of psychological well-being	81.0	65.6	52.9
Bad level of psychological well-being	3.3	15.2	21.6
Report being a happy person	82.4	68.4	56.7
Report being an unhappy person	2.7	13.3	21.6
Feel confident over handling the challenges of life	81.9	69.2	61.6
Feel unconfident over handling the challenges of life	4.2	9.9	18.2
Report having a high level of self-control	79.2	63.7	56.8
Report having a low level of self-control	4.5	8.6	15.8
Feel optimistic over their own future	75.5	60.3	46.0
Feel pessimistic over their own future	5.7	14.3	27.3
Satisfied with their life	81.9	69.0	58.2
Dissatisfied with their life	3.9	12.6	23.3

Table 1 presents an overview of the bivariate relationship between level of attendance at religious services among respondents (excluding special occasions such as marriages and funerals) and mental health/psychological well-being. Six outcomes are included in the analysis: self-reported level of psychological well-being in the three months leading up to taking the survey; how the respondent views himself/herself in terms of how happy they are; confidence over handling the challenges of life (resilience); self-perceived level of self-control in day-to-day life; optimism/pessimism over one’s own future; and life satisfaction.

The bivariate-level analyses suggest that there is a positive association between level of attendance for religious services and mental health/psychological well-being. Among respondents who attend such services at least on a weekly basis, over four in five report that their psychological well-being in the three-month period directly preceding the survey was good overall – 81%. This drops to 65.6% for those who attend such services ‘occasionally’ and even further to 52.9% for those who never attend such religious services (bar special

occasions). For those who attend such religious services on a weekly basis or more, 3.3% say their psychological well-being is bad overall. This rises to 15.2% who attend such services occasionally. Among those who never attend such religious services, more than one in five report a bad level of psychological well-being – 21.6%.

Among respondents who attend such services at least on a weekly basis, over four in five consider themselves to be a happy person – 82.4%. This falls to 68.4% for those who attend such services ‘occasionally’ and even further to 56.7% for those who never attend such religious services (except for special occasions). For those who attend such religious services on a weekly basis or more, 2.7% say that they are unhappy as a person. This rises to 13.3% who attend such services occasionally. Among those who never attend such religious services, more than one in five respondents report being unhappy as a person – 21.6%.

Similar patterns can be reported for a key measure of resilience – how confident one feels over handling the challenges of life. Among respondents who attend such services at least on a weekly basis, over four in five feel confident over handling the everyday challenges of life – 81.9%. This drops to 69.2% for those who attend such services ‘occasionally’ and even further to 61.6% for those who never attend such religious services (except for special occasions such as weddings and funerals). For those who attend such religious services on a weekly basis or more, 4.2% say that they are unconfident on this front. This rises to one in ten among those who attend such services occasionally – 9.9% to be exact. Among those who never attend such religious services, nearly one in five say they are unconfident over handling life’s challenges – 18.2%.

Among those who attend religious services weekly (or more), nearly four in five consider their day-to-day level of self-control to be high – 79.2%. This decreases to 63.7% for those who occasionally attend religious services and falls further to 56.8% for those who never attend. Among respondents who attend religious services at least weekly, 4.5% consider their level of self-control in their day-to-day life to be low overall. This rises to 8.6% for those who occasionally attend religious services. Among those who never attend (excluding special occasions such as marriages and funerals), 15.8% report having a low level of self-control in their everyday life.

There are especially wide differences to report when it comes to being optimistic (or pessimistic) over one’s own future. Among those who attend religious services at least on a weekly basis, around three in four respondents are optimistic over their own future – 75.5%. This drops by more than 15 percentage points among those who occasionally attend such services – around three in five people (60.3%). Among those who never attend religious services, under half – 46% – are optimistic over their future. For respondents who attend such services on a weekly basis (or more), 5.7% report being pessimistic over their future. This rises to 14.3% for those who occasionally attend. Among respondents who never attend religious services, more than a quarter feel pessimistic over their own future – 27.3%.

When it comes to life satisfaction, similar patterns of association (at bivariate level) between level of religious-service attendance and mental/psychological well-being emerge. Among those who attend religious services at least weekly, over four in five say they are satisfied with their life – 81.9%. For those who occasionally attend and never attend, this falls to 69% and

58.2% respectively. For those who attend religious services on a weekly basis (or more), around one in 25 say they are dissatisfied with their own life – 3.9%. This rises to around one in eight for those who occasionally attend such services – 12.6%. Among those who never attend religious services (excluding special occasions such as weddings and funerals), around one in four express life dissatisfaction – 23.3%.



Table 2: Ordinal Logistic Regression Models – Relationship between Importance of Religious Background and Psychological-Well Being, Life Satisfaction, and Optimism

	Psychological Well-Being (Model A1) ¹⁹		Life Satisfaction (Model A2) ²⁰		Optimism over personal future (Model A3) ²¹	
	Log Odds Ratio	Standard Error	Log Odds Ratio	Standard Error	Log Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Female	.159	.130	.186	.138	.201	.126
Age group: 18-24 years (REF)						
25-34 years	-.103	.379	-.079	.446	-.128	.377
35-44 years	.262	.180	.252	.174	.129	.199
45-54 years	.557**	.210	.484*	.202	.318	.227
55-64 years	.673**	.208	.638**	.204	.299	.233
65 years and above	-.230	.750	-1.122	1.197	-1.566	.937
Education level: Postgraduate (REF)						
Degree or equivalent	.252	.152	-.010	.158	-.104	.146
A-level or equivalent	.136	.159	-.158	.168	-.162	.164
GCSE or equivalent	-.280	.278	-.444	.300	-.641*	.268
No formal qualifications	-.301	.309	-.092	.243	-.375	.290
Other/PNTS ²²	-.631	.253	-.459	.268	-.272	.220
Socio-economic status: Employed (REF)						
Self-employed	-1.047	.676	-.678	.783	-.907	.649
Retired	1.208	.750	1.940	1.200	1.840*	.932
Unemployed – searching for work	-.459*	.227	-.610*	.248	-.512*	.247
Unemployed – not searching for work	-1.067**	.237	-.928**	.200	-.989**	.238
Student	-.276	.287	-.083	.346	-.126	.332
Other	-1.134	.340	-.001	.526	-.174	.589
Race: White (REF)						
Asian	.075	.186	-.170	.157	-.043	.178
Black	.743**	.266	.421	.309	.918**	.302
Mixed	.805*	.340	.590	.429	.666**	.241
Other/PNTS	-.878**	.331	-.226	.293	.687	.434

19 Note for Model A1: N = 1,949. Chi-square: 195.54. P-value<0.05. (.000). -2LL: 2643.41. Pseudo R Squared: 0.05. Source: IIFL/Techne Sept-Oct 2023 Survey. *p<0.05. **p<0.01.

20 Note for Model A2: N = 1,949. Chi-square: 148.25. P-value<0.05. (.000). -2LL: 2623.13. Pseudo R Squared: 0.04. Source: IIFL/Techne Sept-Oct 2023 Survey. *p<0.05. **p<0.01.

21 Note for Model A3: N = 1,949. Chi-square: 149.73. P-value<0.05. (.000). -2LL: 2683.35. Pseudo R Squared: 0.04. Source: IIFL/Techne Sept-Oct 2023 Survey. *p<0.05. **p<0.01.

22 The “Other” category includes cases where respondents stated they had apprenticeship-related qualifications but did not know their equivalent level/grading. PNTS stands for “Prefer Not To Say”.

Importance of Religious background to Personal Identity: Important (REF)						
Neither Important nor unimportant	-.557**	.134	-.797**	.128	-.732**	.133
Unimportant	-.629**	.157	-.632**	.173	-.799**	.154
Don't Know/Not Sure	-1.065**	.302	-.727*	.285	-.970**	.282
/cut1	-3.013	.247	-3.112	.261	-3.354	.254
/cut2	-1.747	.224	-1.920	.242	-2.100	.242
/cut3	-.519	.228	-.915	.257	-.829	.243
/cut4	1.500	.222	1.267	.256	1.350	.239

Table 2 presents an overview of ordinal logistic regression analysis for three models predicting for the following: psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and optimism over one's own future. The key independent variable of interest is how important one's religious background is to their personal identity. Each model controls for five socio-demographic characteristics: sex, age, education level, socio-economic status, and race.

Controlling for all other variables, there is a statistically significant relationship between importance of religious background to personal identity and psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and optimism over personal future.

In Model A1, respondents who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity are significantly less likely to report good psychological well-being (over the three months leading up to taking the survey) than those who say their religious background is important to their personal identity ($b = -.629$) – controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status, and race. This finding is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Respondents who say their religious background is neither important nor unimportant to their personal identity are also significantly less likely to report good psychological well-being than those who say their religious background is important to their personal identity ($b = -.557$). This finding is also statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

In Model A2, respondents who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity are significantly less likely to report life satisfaction than those who say their religious background is important to their personal identity ($b = -.632$) – controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status, and race. This finding is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Respondents who say their religious background is neither important nor unimportant to their personal identity are also significantly less likely to report good psychological well-being than those who say their religious background is important to their personal identity ($b = -.797$). This finding is also statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

In Model A3, respondents who say their religious background is unimportant to their personal identity are significantly less likely to report being optimistic over their own future, than those who say their religious background is important to their personal identity ($b = -.799$) – controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status, and race. This finding is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Respondents who say their religious background is neither important nor unimportant to their personal identity are also significantly less likely to report being optimistic over their own future, than those who say their religious background is important to their personal identity ($b = -.732$). This finding is also statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

Controlling for age, sex, education, socio-economic status and race, **there is a statistically significant association between religious background having less importance in one's personal identity and a lower likelihood of reporting positive mental health outcomes** (in this case, psychological well-being, life satisfaction and optimism over one's own future).

Table 3: Ordinal Logistic Regression Models – Relationship between Importance of Level of Attendance for Religious Services and Psychological-Well Being, Life Satisfaction, and Optimism

	Psychological Well-Being (Model B1) ²³		Life Satisfaction (Model B2) ²⁴		Optimism over personal future (Model B3) ²⁵	
	Log Odds Ratio	Standard Error	Log Odds Ratio	Standard Error	Log Odds Ratio	Standard Error
Female	.162	.129	.190	.135	.205	.125
Age group: 18-24 years (REF)						
25-34 years	-.164	.376	-.077	.432	-.158	.378
35-44 years	.217	.177	.238	.172	.078	.198
45-54 years	.567**	.203	.530**	.195	.334	.219
55-64 years	.653**	.205	.629**	.198	.264	.227
65 years and above	-.170	.638	-.980	1.078	-1.475	.775
Education level: Postgraduate (REF)						
Degree or equivalent	.295	.157	.012	.157	-.090	.150
A-level or equivalent	.177	.161	-.137	.161	-.138	.164
GCSE or equivalent	-.253	.274	-.436	.274	-.630*	.264
No formal qualifications	-.255	.311	-.084	.311	-.379	.283
Other/PNTS	-.660**	.242	-.468	.258	-.290	.210
Socio-economic status: Employed (REF)						
Self-employed	-1.025	.678	-.653	.784	-.867	.655
Retired	1.164	.634	1.828	1.079	1.762*	.768
Unemployed – searching for work	-.508*	.219	-.639**	.237	-.540*	.246
Unemployed – not searching for work	-1.034**	.239	-.866**	.202	-.900**	.241
Student	-.350	.286	-.040	.346	-.138	.325
Other	-.978	.356	.056	.505	-.053	.565
Race: White (REF)						
Asian	.048	.187	-.194	.159	-.077	.184
Black	.634	.271	.327	.314	.797*	.318
Mixed	.637	.333	.448	.421	.521*	.218
Other/PNTS	-.851	.360	-.130	.287	.759	.408

23 Note for Model B1: N = 1,949. Chi-square: 225.12. P-value<0.05. (.000). -2LL: 2632.78. Pseudo R Squared: 0.06. Source: IIFL/Techne Sept-Oct 2023 Survey. *p<0.05. **p<0.01.

24 Note for Model B1: N = 1,949. Chi-square: 225.12. P-value<0.05. (.000). -2LL: 2632.78. Pseudo R Squared: 0.06. Source: IIFL/Techne Sept-Oct 2023 Survey. *p<0.05. **p<0.01.

25 Note for Model B3: N = 1,949. Chi-square: 171.58. P-value<0.05. (.000). -2LL: 2674.62. Pseudo R Squared: 0.05. Source: IIFL/Techne Sept-Oct 2023 Survey. *p<0.05. **p<0.01.

Level of Attendance for Religious Services: At least weekly (REF)						
Occasionally	-.743**	.142	-.687**	.139	-.666**	.143
Never Attend	-1.025**	.170	-1.019**	.180	-1.175**	.167
Don't Know/Not Sure	-1.440**	.270	-.803**	.256	-1.062**	.286
/cut1	-3.391	.253	-3.395	.257	-3.678	.262
/cut2	-2.122	.236	-2.197	.248	-2.420	.256
/cut3	-.886	.241	-1.190	.265	-1.148	.259
/cut4	1.149	.232	.994	.262	1.042	.251

Table 3 presents an overview of ordinal logistic regression analysis for three models predicting for the following: psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and optimism over one's own future. The key independent variable of interest is level of attendance for religious services (excluding occasions such as weddings and funerals). Each model controls for five socio-demographic characteristics: sex, age, education level, socio-economic status, and race.

Controlling for all other variables, there is a statistically significant relationship between importance of religious background to personal identity and psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and optimism over personal future.

In Model B1, respondents who say they never attend religious services (bar special occasions such as weddings and funerals) are significantly less likely to report good psychological well-being than those who report attending such services at least on a weekly basis ($b = -1.025$) – controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status, and race. This finding is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Respondents who 'occasionally' attend religious services are also significantly less likely to report good psychological well-being than those who attend such services weekly or more ($b = -.743$). This finding is also statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

In Model B2, respondents who say they never attend religious services are significantly less likely to report life satisfaction than those who say they attend such services at least on a weekly basis ($b = -1.019$) – controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status, and race. This finding is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Respondents who 'occasionally' attend religious services are also significantly less likely to report life satisfaction than those who say they attend such services weekly or more ($b = -.687$). This finding is also statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

In Model B3, respondents who say they never attend religious services are significantly less likely to report optimism over their own future, than those who say they attend such services at least on a weekly basis ($b = -1.175$) – controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status,

and race. This finding is statistically significant at the 1% confidence level. Respondents who 'occasionally' attend religious services are also significantly less likely to report being optimistic over their personal future than those who say they attend such services weekly or more ($b = -.666$). This finding is also statistically significant at the 1% confidence level.

Controlling for age, sex, education, socio-economic status and race, **there is a statistically significant association between lower levels of religious-service attendance and a reduced likelihood of reporting positive mental health outcomes** (in this case, psychological well-being, life satisfaction and optimism over one's own future).



4. Discussion and conclusion

The role of faith, religiosity, and spirituality in the context of mental health and psychological well-being was a relatively underdeveloped area of research in modern Britain. This is potentially reflective of the rapid secularisation of British society and scepticism of the social value of faith in academic spheres with progressive liberal biases (which may be more reliant on superficial 'lived experiences' as opposed to advanced quantitative research methods). The Institute for the Impact of Faith of Life (IIFL) has sought to address this through the quantitative analysis presented in this inaugural report, which was reliant on a bespoke survey conducted by TechnoUK (a member of the British Polling Council [BPC]).

The evidence suggests that religiosity and spirituality can have a positive impact on mental health and psychological well-being in 21st Century Britain. Whether it is one's religious background having an important role in their personal identity, having a strong attachment to God/Gods/Higher Spiritual Beings, or reporting a clear religious affiliation (Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist or Jewish), these indicators of religiosity (or spirituality) are positively associated with self-reported levels of psychological well-being, happiness, confidence over handling life's challenges, self-control on a day-to-day basis, life satisfaction, and optimism over personal future. These patterns of association do not only exist on the bivariate level. Multivariate analysis in the form of ordinal logistic regression (with models controlling for sex, age, education, socio-economic status, and race) found a statistically significant relationship between the importance of religious background to personal identity and three dependent variables: psychological well-being, life satisfaction and feeling optimistic over one's own future.

These patterns of association are replicated when it comes to level of attendance for religious services and mental health/psychological well-being. Those in the UK who attend religious services (excluding special occasions such as weddings and funerals) are notably more likely to report positive psychological well-being and mental health outcomes when compared to those who either occasionally or never attend such services. These relationships are statistically significant at the multivariate level when controlling for socio-demographic characteristics such as sex, age, education, economic activity, and racial identity. While much of the secularised and identitarian socio-political discourse tends to focus on 'protected characteristics' such as sex and race when understanding mental health and psychological well-being outcomes, this advanced quantitative analysis reliant on fresh nationally-representative survey data very much suggests that the positive impact of faith and spirituality needs to be given greater mainstream attention in this context.

The findings also provide much food for thought in terms of how we should view the fast-paced secularisation of mainstream British society and the rise of atheistic tendencies. The 'de-Christianisation' of Britain and the increasing levels of those who state that they are of 'no religion' could be welcomed as a victory for social progress among liberal secularists who reject the view that faith can be a force for good in modern society. However, the data presented in this report suggests that this has potentially left mainstream Britain more exposed and vulnerable in terms of mental resilience and psychological well-being – increasing sections of the population which are less confident over coping with the stresses and pressure of life and more pessimistic over their own futures. With the data analysis demonstrating that

faith and spirituality can be sources of resilience, confidence, and optimism, it is perfectly reasonable to offer the view that Britain's growing faith minorities embody the value of religion in regards to psychological well-being and mental health – especially its relatively religious Muslim communities which are all too often collectively portrayed as a downtrodden and miserable monolithic bloc in the UK.

In an era of rampant secularism, social atomisation and materialistic individualism, the social capital and civic connections which can be fostered by cohesive religious communities and regularly attending faith-based services at places of worship is worthy of stronger attention. The evidence points us towards the possibility of attending religious services providing an organic sense of belonging and rootedness which are foundational to positive forms of mental health and psychological well-being. The value of community spirit and civic-mindedness in this context should not only be underestimated – it should be further explored in terms of producing practical and sustainable solutions which are designed to combat loneliness and social isolation in modern Britain, as well as encouraging those with negative outlooks on one's personal existence and their outlook on life towards more positive and optimistic mindsets. When it comes to mental resilience and psychological wellness in the UK, it is time for politicians, policymakers, and practitioners to unlock the potential of faith, religion, and spirituality and harness it in our local communities.