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## The Impact of Religious Self-Identification on Happiness and Well-Being: A Case Study of Kazakhstan

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### ABSTRACT

Faith helps religious people persevere, hold back, refrain from fighting as much as possible, bear through life tribulations, and keep their loved ones in good spirits. Therefore, it can be hypothesized that people who identify as believers are happier than those who do not. The purpose of this study is to determine the influence of religiosity on self-assessed well-being and satisfaction with various material and immaterial aspects of life from the perspective of religious and nonreligious people and to determine the strength of the effect of religion on subjective well-being in contrast to other socioeconomic factors. In the present study, 1,500 respondents from Kazakhstan took a survey that touched upon their perceptions of social well-being and self-assessed religious status. The survey results were subjected to quantitative analysis via descriptive statistics and correlation analysis via Spearman's rank correlation coefficient and the Mann–Whitney U test. The results indicate that people in Kazakhstan demonstrate a fairly high level of self-assessed happiness. There is a statistically significant, albeit weak, correlation between self-assessed happiness

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and being religious. Research shows that regardless of religiosity, happiness is likely to be experienced by people if they are healthy.

#### KEYWORDS

Christianity, Eastern Orthodoxy, faith, Islam, life satisfaction

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## Introduction

The concept of happiness and well-being has become a focal point in social science research, particularly in understanding the factors that contribute to life satisfaction across different cultural and socioeconomic contexts (Alieva & Sheripova, 2024; Sheripova & Alieva, 2024). The relationship between religiosity and happiness has been a subject of considerable academic interest, with numerous studies suggesting that religious beliefs and practices can significantly influence an individual's sense of well-being (Alimova et al., 2023; Togaibayeva et al., 2021). However, the nature of this relationship remains complex and context dependent, varying across different societies and religious contexts.

In 2011, the UN at its 65<sup>th</sup> session adopted the resolution *Happiness: Toward a Holistic Approach to Development* (United Nations, 2011), which recognized international happiness indices as key parameters of the successful development of states. Creating the greatest possible level of happiness for people is adopted as the goal of social development instead of the growth of wealth.

The UN annually publishes happiness rankings for different countries on the basis of six key variables that help explain people's life assessments. These variables include GDP per capita, social support, healthy life expectancy, freedom, generosity, and corruption (Helliwell et al., 2024). These happiness rankings do not rely on a single index of the six factors. Instead, scores are based on people's assessments of their lives.

Material and social living conditions do not exhaust the conditions in which a person can be happy. Happiness is a state of social or individual consciousness that has spiritual and worldview roots. Religion in accordance with its function presents believers with a system of worldview coordinates, which contributes to subjective well-being (Divisenko & Belov, 2017).

The choice of this topic is motivated by the unique sociocultural landscape of Kazakhstan, a country characterized by its multicultural and multiconfessional society. As Kazakhstan continues to evolve in terms of socioeconomic development,

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understanding the factors that contribute to the well-being of its citizens becomes increasingly important (Bagratuni et al., 2023; Bayazitova et al., 2023).

Given the focus of our research, we should note that the ranking is criticized in academia for using a limited set of variables (factors) to explain life assessments in different countries. These variables cannot give proper credit to other influential factors that are either not measured or measured indirectly. This may result in erroneous conclusions about the factors that affect well-being. Furthermore, the method of assessing happiness may be subject to cultural bias, since different cultures can interpret happiness differently or show different trends in reactions to surveys (Alieva & Sheripova, 2024; Tungatova et al., 2023). For example, cultural norms can influence the probability of how respondents rate their level of happiness, e.g., one may claim that it depends on the semiotic code of every single culture (Wu et al., 2023).

In continuation of this argument, when planning this study, we proceeded from the need for theoretical reconstruction referencing the concepts of religiosity, happiness, subjective well-being, and religious spirituality to determine the place and possibilities of religion in the life of the modern society of a particular country.

Researchers have documented that links between religion and well-being persist in different cultural contexts, although they are strongest in more religious countries (Tay et al., 2014; Togaibayeva et al., 2021). By demonstrating the positive role of religion in life assessment by believers at the individual level, researchers have consistently argued that religion works as a coping mechanism and gives meaning in life to those who participate and believe in religion (Mussatayeva et al., 2024; Smagulov et al., 2023). This effect is achieved because people can use "God's will" to explain why they are experiencing difficulties (González-Rivera et al., 2017; Sinnewe et al., 2015). The more firm, devoid of scrupling respondents' faith, the more likely they are to feel happy (Rojas & Watkins-Fassler, 2022).

The relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being is not direct but depends on several other factors (Divisenko & Belov, 2017). Lim and Putnam (2010) reported that regular attendance of religious services and having friends from the congregation were important factors in life satisfaction. Hackney and Sanders (2003) determined that a stronger religious identity allows people to use their religion to reevaluate difficult situations and achieve personal spiritual growth. A survey in more than 20 countries revealed that more frequent participation in a religious community is associated with higher happiness levels (Ugur & Aydin, 2022; Zabolotskaia et al., 2021).

Large-scale European and global research indicates that a positive connection between religiosity and life satisfaction is stronger in highly religious countries; cultures with a low level of religiosity show a negative relationship (Gan et al., 2023; Pöhls, 2021; Sholihin et al., 2022). Berg and Veenhoven (2010) and Aldiyarova et al. (2023) reported a negative correlation between how much importance people assign to religion and the happiness of their country. In one of the world's happiest country, Denmark (Happiest Countries in the World 2024, n.d.), religion has received little attention, whereas highly religious countries such as Zimbabwe have the lowest happiness levels. Similarly, the religious countries of Southern Europe are less happy than the less religious countries of Northern Europe.

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Mak et al. (2011) and Edling et al. (2014), who reported no correlation between religiosity and happiness, stated that stronger religious devotion does not have a significant direct effect on a person's affective experience. Sorokoumova (2021) noted that there is no reason to consider religion important for happiness, well-being, or depression. Nonreligious people do not risk being less happy than religious people because religion usually does not matter for happiness. Religiosity can increase social support, and social support is associated with happiness. However, once social support is statistically controlled, most of religiosity's effect on happiness is mediated. If religious behavior does not affect happiness, it is likely to be an indirect influence of social media (Sehmi et al., 2020; Speed et al., 2020). The relationship between religion and life may also stem from the influence of social support networks within church groups. Support networks based on religious beliefs are often more important in life than other social networks are. The reason for this can be that people tend to find greater meaning in things when social exchange comes from someone with whom they share basic goals and values.

The well-being and quality of life of atheistic communities remain largely unexplored. Nevertheless, some studies are worth highlighting and considering. Several scholars have concluded in their analysis of happiness that it has no significant or meaningful relationship with either religiousness or nonreligiousness and that empirical evidence shows no difference in subjective well-being between religious and secular people (Edling et al., 2014). Sociopsychological studies on a large sample of atheists and believers (Christians and Buddhists) indicate that there are no significant differences between these groups in terms of subjective well-being and empathy (González-Rivera et al., 2019). Leondari and Gialamas (2009) suggested that different religious beliefs and leaving religion can be linked to life satisfaction. Researchers have reported that faith is not related to any of the indicators of psychological well-being used in this study. On the other hand, in a study conducted by Baker et al. (2018), atheists demonstrated better physical health and fewer mental health symptoms (anxiety, paranoia, obsessions, and compulsions) than other secular people and believers did.

The inconsistencies of different studies can be explained by their dissimilar practical implementation and different assessment tools (Villani et al., 2019). Religion influences people's quality of life at both the macro and micro levels of social reality (Divisenko & Belov, 2017). The results at the country level may differ from those at the individual level. The relationship between faith and happiness does not seem to be universal. There is no research to answer what the cause and consequences are: whether faith makes people happier or happier people are more likely to believe (Berg & Veenhoven, 2010). Furthermore, the effects of religiosity as a predictor of greater happiness are contingent on the respondent's culture, lifestyle, and circumstances (Diener et al., 2018). Distinguishing cause-from effect requires longitudinal studies of people who leave or join a religion.

Each country, including Kazakhstan, has unique cultural and social features that can affect the relationship between religion and happiness (Amirbekova et al., 2013). The problem of the connection between religion and subjective well-being in

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the social reality of Kazakhstan has several gaps. Research into the understanding of happiness in society has not developed as intensively in Kazakhstan as in Europe or the USA, although interest in this subject is growing. Kazakhstan participated in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> rounds of the World Values Survey. The survey in Kazakhstan as part of the 6<sup>th</sup> wave was conducted by BISAM Central Asia. The 7<sup>th</sup> wave survey was conducted by the Public Opinion Research Institute (World Values Survey Association, 2018). The 2024 World Happiness Report (Country Rankings by Life Evaluations from 2021–2023) ranks Kazakhstan 49<sup>th</sup> (out of 143 countries). However, considering age groups in the happiness ranking, Kazakhstan ranks 69<sup>th</sup> in terms of the happiness of youth (under 30 years old), whereas it ranks 42<sup>nd</sup> in the ranking of people aged 60 and older (Helliwell et al., 2024). This significant gap in happiness between different age groups, particularly in terms of reduced happiness among youth everywhere except Western Europe, demonstrates the need to find factors that could better capture and explain ongoing social processes.

Research interest in the positive aspects of human existence has led to the emergence of numerous theoretical concepts and empirical studies developing the concepts “life satisfaction,” “quality of life,” “subjective well-being,” “psychological well-being,” and “happiness.” It is rather problematic to correlate these terms, since their elements are partially overlapping, and the constructs are defined by referring to related concepts.

Given the lack of Kazakhstani studies on the relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being, the research question we address in this paper is as follows: are there statistically significant differences in the level of happiness between believers and nonbelievers in Kazakhstan as a secular state with a multicultural and multiconfessional society?

The research goal is to determine the influence of religiosity on self-assessed well-being and satisfaction with different aspects of life.

Thus, the authors of the study set the following tasks:

- To assess satisfaction with various material and immaterial (spiritual, social) aspects of life from the standpoint of both believers and nonbelievers.
- To establish the strength of the effect of religion on subjective well-being compared with other socioeconomic factors.

## Methods

### Sample

The data used in this study are based on the results of research conducted in 2022. The mass survey was initiated and designed by a research team that included the authors of this article. The field stage of research and statistical data processing was carried out by BISAM Central Asia (2021). The sample size was  $N = 1,500$  (Table 1). The survey used a random multistage cluster sample representative of regional, settlement, gender, age, and national population profiles. The population survey was conducted via standardized personal interviews via the CAPI method. The sampling error at the 95% confidence interval did not exceed  $\pm 2.5\%$ . The survey utilized

a questionnaire on personal perceptions of one’s social well-being and respondents’ self-assessed religious status.

**Table 1**  
*Demographic Information About the Respondents*

Category		N	Percentage
Type of settlement	City	897	59.8
	Village	603	40.2
Gender	Male	726	48.4
	Female	774	51.6
Age	Under 18	0	0.0
	18–24	225	15.0
	25–34	415	27.7
	35–44	339	22.6
	45–54	280	18.7
	55–65	241	16.1
	Over 65	0	0.0
Ethnicity	Kazakh	997	66.5
	Russian	323	21.5
	Other	179	11.9
	Mixed ancestry, cannot define ethnicity	1	0.1

**Methods**

In this study, we proceeded with the premise that subjective well-being has two components: happiness, that is an affective component, and life satisfaction representing a cognitive component (Rikel et al., 2017). Accordingly, the social well-being of believers and atheists was assessed in the survey through the following questions:

1. Speaking about your life in general, how happy or unhappy are you?
2. Considering all aspects of life, how satisfied are you with your life in general at present?

These questions used a 5-point scale ranging from *very unhappy* to *very happy* and from *completely dissatisfied* to *completely satisfied*, where the answer options ranged from 1 to 5 points. The dependent variable was an index of subjective well-being, which included *happiness* and *life satisfaction* with the same weight.

To analyze the relationship between religiosity and the level of subjective well-being, we operationalized religiosity in terms of the respondents’ religious self-identification. The survey included the question “Do you consider yourself a religious person?” The respondents were offered one of the following responses to this question:

1. I am a believer, I participate in the life of a religious community, consistently follow religious norms, lead a religious lifestyle, and regularly visit religious temples (mosque, Orthodox church, church, kirkha, synagogue, Buddhist temple, prayer house, etc.).
2. I am a believer, observe some religious norms, rarely visit religious temples and religious community.
3. I am a believer but virtually do not participate in religious life.

4. I am a nonbeliever but sometimes visit religious temples due to ethnocultural traditions.

5. I am a nonbeliever and am indifferent to religious traditions.

6. I am an opponent of religion.

On the basis of the chosen answer option, the study participants were divided into devoutly believing (answer option 1), nominally believing (answer options 2–3), and nonbelieving (answer options 4–6).

A question on the confessional preferences of the respondents was also included to determine whether religious affiliation had an impact on the subjective well-being of people.

To compare the peculiarities in the assessments of subjective well-being by believers and nonbelievers with respect to its cognitive component, the survey included variables reflecting satisfaction with different aspects of life. The respondents were asked to answer the question “To what extent are you satisfied with the following aspects of your life?” across 11 items: Economic status; Living conditions; Health; Spiritual well-being; Family relationships; Relationships with members of the religious community; Personal qualities; Professional realization; Personal safety; Situation in the country; The work of the government. The respondents rated their agreement with the statement on a 5-point scale from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 5 (*completely satisfied*). As control variables, we also considered several socio-demographic characteristics, such as gender, age, marital status, nationality, residence in a city/village, and employment status. Various prior studies have shown that these factors affect a person’s subjective well-being.

The present study tested the following research hypotheses:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Respondents’ religiosity affects their level of subjective well-being.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** Respondents’ religious self-identification does not affect their level of self-assessed happiness.

**Hypothesis 3 (H3):** Depending on the degree of respondents’ religiosity, a different set of variables may determine subjective well-being.

### **Data Analysis**

The present research is based on a descriptive nonexperimental cross-sectional study. Data analysis was performed with IBM SPSS Statistics 25 software. The analysis included descriptive statistics calculation, evaluation of data distribution normality and the reliability of the employed scales, and group comparative correlation analysis (Spearman’s rank correlation coefficient, Mann–Whitney U test).

### **Results**

Our research was conducted without fully removing the limitations of COVID-19, and the value of health significantly increased for respondents at all levels of religious engagement. The correlations obtained in our study reflect the influence of religiosity on the happiness of an average citizen. The effect might be more pronounced in certain

categories. Religiosity has a greater impact on the happiness of people who find the spiritual aspects of religion more important than the ceremonial aspects or who need social and emotional support (elderly people, widows, poorly educated people, and unemployed people). However, the small number of respondents in the subsamples prevented us from analyzing these aspects.

According to the respondents' self-assessed religious status, 187 (12.5%) were devout believers, 1,063 (70.8%) were nominal believers, and 250 (16.7%) were nonbelievers. This distribution matches the results of previous studies conducted in Kazakhstan (Togaibayeva et al., 2021).

The mean level of happiness on a 5-point scale in Kazakhstan is 4.18 ( $SD = 0.61$ ). Correlation analysis of the total sample with Spearman's rank correlation coefficient reveals a statistically significant but weak connection between having faith and the level of happiness:  $r_s = +0.084$  (the correlation is significant at the .01 level, that is two-tailed). Let us consider the distribution of respondents' self-assessed personal well-being by the level of religiosity (Table 2). We observed that people who considered themselves very happy were somewhat more prevalent among devout believers. The shares of "rather happy," "unhappy," and "very unhappy" respondents taken together were lower in the two groups of religious respondents than in the nonbelievers.

**Table 2**

*Distribution of the Respondents' Answers About Happiness by Level of Religiosity (2021, N = 1,500)*

Response	Devout believers		Nominal believers		Nonbelievers	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Very happy	71	38.0	280	26.3	72	28.8
Happy	103	55.1	692	65.1	145	58.0
Rather happy	7	3.7	84	7.9	32	12.8
Unhappy	5	2.7	7	0.7	1	0.4
Very unhappy	1	0.5	0	0.0	0	0.0
Total	187	100.0	1,063	100.0	250	100.0

The study further revealed that sociodemographic characteristics did not affect the happiness of devout believers. For nominal believers,  $r_s = +.174$  (correlation significant at the level of .01, two-tailed) and nonbelievers,  $r_s = +.177$  (correlation significant at the level of .01, two-tailed), married individuals were the happiest. A gradual decrease in happiness with age was observed in nominal believers:  $r_s = -.086$  (correlation significant at the level of .01, two-tailed). Women in this group were somewhat happier than men:  $r_s = +.08$  (correlation significant at the level of .01, two-tailed).

Comparing average happiness levels across the different respondent groups, we found the highest level among devout believers ( $\mu = 4.27$ ,  $SD = 0.71$ ), somewhat lower happiness among nominal believers ( $\mu = 4.17$ ,  $SD = 0.58$ ), and the lowest level among nonbelievers ( $\mu = 4.15$ ,  $SD = 0.64$ ). Overall, all respondent groups fell within the range of a high level of happiness.



The question is whether the described differences in subjective well-being among the three groups are statistically significant. To answer this question, group differences were analyzed via the nonparametric Mann–Whitney U test. The analysis demonstrated that devout believers (*Mean rank* = 234.01) had a significantly higher happiness level than nonbelievers did (*Mean rank* = 207.77):  $U = 20568.000$ ,  $Z = -2.431$ ,  $p = .015$ ,  $r_s = .008$ . Furthermore, no differences were found between nominal believers (*Mean rank* = 658.39) and nonbelievers (*Mean rank* = 651.07):  $U = 131392.500$ ,  $Z = -.324$ ,  $p = .746$ , and  $r_s = .372$ . These results allow us to conclude that devout believers feel happier than nominal believers and nonreligious respondents do. However, this significant difference between the groups is not significant enough to guarantee happiness. Thus, the degree of engagement of the respondents' religious self-identification weakly influenced their subjective well-being.

To determine whether confessional affiliation affects happiness, we analyzed the relationship between self-assessed happiness and religious affiliation among religious respondents, with Islamic and Eastern Orthodox faiths being the two most predominant religions in Kazakhstan. Owing to their small sample sizes, other religious confessions could not be included in the analysis and were instead grouped under the category of "other." The distribution of self-assessed happiness by respondents' confessional affiliations indicated that representatives of Islam were happier than Eastern Orthodox Christians were (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Self-Assessed Happiness of Respondents Distinguished by Religious Affiliation*

Religious Affiliation	N	Very happy	Happy	Rather happy	Unhappy	Very unhappy	Total percentage
Islam	955	34.6%	51.2%	10.7%	2.8%	0.7%	76.4%
Eastern Orthodoxy	261	21.1%	54.9%	15.4%	6.8%	1.9%	20.9%
Other	34	20.6%	52.9%	17.6%	8.8%	0.0%	2.7%

Given the abnormal distribution of the variables, we once again deployed the Mann–Whitney U test. The results revealed that the differences in happiness between the representatives of Islam (*Mean rank* = 644.02) and Eastern Orthodoxy (*Mean rank* = 529.89) are statistically significant:  $U = 105438.500$ ,  $Z = -5.077$ ,  $p = .000$ , and  $r_s = .000$ .

However, these differences cannot be attributed exclusively to confessional factors. Our analysis also established a superimposition of the factors of religious confession and nationality. Muslim Kazakhs were found to be happier ( $r_s = +.151$ ) (correlation significant at the level of .01, two-tailed) than Orthodox Russian and nonbelievers belonging to other ethnic groups.

By analyzing differences in the cognitive component of happiness between believers and nonbelievers, we found that the happiness of religious Kazakhs was associated with their satisfaction with the situation in the country and their health. Satisfaction with all other aspects of life and social ties, including relations with members of the religious community, did not affect the personal happiness of

religious people. For nominal believers and nonbelievers, more factors describing social life circumstances are correlated with happiness. In these groups, self-assessed happiness was influenced by satisfaction with economic status and living conditions in addition to satisfaction with health. Greater happiness was demonstrated among nominal believers by those who were satisfied with the overall situation in the country, personal safety, and personal qualities. The closest association with happiness in nonbelievers was demonstrated by satisfaction with one’s economic status, professional realization, and health. In addition to these factors, family relationships and living conditions are important in this group (Table 4).

**Table 4**  
*Results of Correlation Analysis of Satisfaction With Various Aspects of Life and Subjective Well-Being and the Influence of Socio-Demographic Parameters on the Level of Happiness*

	Total sample	Devout believers	Nominal believers	Nonbelievers
Family economic status	+0.163**	+0.139	+0.153**	+0.155**
Living conditions	+0.121**	+0.049	+0.126**	+0.122**
Health	+0.163**	+0.150*	+0.170**	+0.168**
Spiritual well-being	+0.076**	-0.028	+0.086**	+0.077**
Family relationships	+0.100**	+0.092	+0.098**	+0.097**
Relationships with friends	+0.064*	+0.047	+0.089**	+0.085**
Relationships with members of the religious community *	+0.018	+0.014	+0.010	+0.015
Personal qualities	+0.105**	+0.125	+0.117**	+0.117**
Professional realization	+0.114**	+0.055	+0.101**	+0.099**
Personal safety	+0.107**	+0.125	+0.121**	+0.123**
Situation in the country	+0.134**	+0.195*	+0.128**	+0.139**
The work of the government	+0.098**	+0.060	+0.082*	+0.084**
Education	+0.002	-0.026	+0.019	+0.010
Settlement	+0.013	-0.004	-0.009	-0.008
Income	-0.002	-0.019	-0.013	-0.016
Nationality	+0.083**	+0.080	+0.100**	+0.099**
Marital status	+0.175**	+0.077	+0.174**	+0.165**
Gender	+0.041	+0.021	+0.080**	+0.071*
Age	-0.062*	+0.028	-0.086**	-0.074**

Note. \* The correlation is significant at the .05 level; \*\* the correlation is significant at the .01 level.

The size of income and the availability of work did not affect feelings of happiness in any of the respondent groups. There was a positive correlation between happiness and satisfaction with economic status in nominally believing and nonbelieving people.

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In our study, devout believers revealed a connection between happiness and the respondents' confidence that religion contributes to spiritual purification and repentance and that the observance of religious norms and values in life deters from immoral deeds. In nominal believers, there was a positive correlation between happiness and conviction that religion provides great opportunities for the development of spiritual and moral values and spiritually enriches a person. Negative correlates of happiness in nominal believers were associated with doubts about the existence of God and the approval of the possibility of transition from faith to nonbelief. Differences in the happiness profiles of believers and nonbelievers point to the need for different grounds in studies of the relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being.

## Discussion

Our study revealed a high level of self-assessed happiness among people in Kazakhstan. This result is expected because previous studies also found Kazakhstan to have one of the highest happiness levels among Central Asian countries. This is due to the gradual improvement in socioeconomic and political conditions and expanding modernization in the country (Yessimova et al., 2024).

Our research revealed a statistically significant positive, albeit weak, relationship between faith and the respondents' happiness (H1). This finding is consistent with the results of several studies. Specifically, Villani et al. (2019) reported that adherence to a particular religious worldview helps both religious and nominally religious people experience positive emotions. Fredrickson (2002) demonstrated the role of religiosity in the emergence of positive emotions, whereas Vishkin et al. (2016) and Zein et al. (2022) reported that religious people learn more adaptive strategies to regulate their emotions.

Depending on the degree of religiosity, the respondents reported different levels of self-assessed happiness (H2). Compared with nominal believers, devout believers were somewhat happier and showed a small average difference in self-assessed social well-being, although this difference is not significant enough to guarantee happiness. All the respondents, i.e., devout believers, nominal believers, and nonbelievers, demonstrated a high level of happiness (Table 2).

The issue of statistically significant differences in the level of social well-being between believers and nonbelievers in Kazakhstan (H3) requires a more detailed discussion. Previous studies have shown that self-assessed happiness is influenced by gender, age, and marital status, although this relationship is not universal across countries (Helliwell et al., 2018). Other problems may become more acute with age, e.g., in the family or at work (Bayazitova et al., 2023). Our study revealed that socio-demographic characteristics do not influence the happiness of religious respondents, but among nominally believing and nonbelieving respondents, those who were married felt the happiest. The same can be observed in the results of Jebb et al. (2020). In every part of the world, married people have greater subjective well-being than unmarried people. The findings of Helliwell et al. (2018) indicate that married people at every stage of life in the USA have greater life satisfaction. For Kazakhstan, the institution of marriage has historically served an important function in regulating

quality of life, especially for young women, as well as for the continuation of the species (Zhunussova, 2022). Gender differences are superimposed on the feeling of happiness among nominal believers: in this group, women are somewhat happier than men. This finding is also consistent with previous research findings suggesting possible differences in happiness between men and women in different social groups (Helliwell et al., 2018).

The structures of social well-being characteristic of devout believers, nominal believers, and nonbelievers are different. Among all the variables correlated with self-assessed happiness in general for the whole sample, only satisfaction with health showed a significant correlation in all groups (Table 4). This parameter has a positive effect on the social well-being of both believers and nonbelievers. Health not only influences the state of happiness but also affects all other variables and is the foundation of happiness (Chernysh, 2020; Gurinovich & Petrykina, 2021).

Almost all the variables that are significant for the happiness of nonbelievers are also significant for nominal believers. Satisfaction with life circumstances such as economic status, living conditions, family relationships, professional self-realization, the work of the government, and the situation in the country is important for respondents in both groups in their self-assessment of happiness.

There is no association between income level and the overall social well-being of people both across the sample and among devoutly believing, nominally believing, and nonbelieving respondents. This result is different from the findings of existing studies (Boes & Winkelmann, 2010; Rukumnuaykit, 2016), which have revealed a robust statistically significant relationship between respondents' income and their level of happiness irrespective of their level of religiosity. Research has also shown that a lack of differences in happiness across different income levels is characteristic of developed countries as opposed to poorer countries, where these differences are strong (Easterlin & O'Connor, 2020).

Kazakhstan belongs to a group of developing countries. The absence of a direct dependence of the population's self-assessed happiness on income can be explained by the fact that the level of income does not play a major role in assessing one's well-being in life as the person's subjective satisfaction with their material status does, which is conditioned by the level of claims and lifestyle they find minimally acceptable. Accordingly, our study reveals a positive correlation between happiness and satisfaction with economic status in nominally believing and nonbelieving people.

The lack of dependence of the level of happiness on income can also be explained from the perspective of comparison theory, which suggests that income affects life satisfaction indirectly through the individual's expectations and situations of social comparison (McBride, 2010). Inflating income expectations and comparing one's income with the higher earnings of others have a detrimental effect on life satisfaction (Eskerhanova et al., 2023; Rybakov et al., 2022), whereas the current amount of income by itself does not have such an influence.

Among nominal believers, Kazakhs are happier than representatives of other ethnic groups. This finding agrees with the data of a cross-country study, in which Kazakhstan refers to the group of countries where the assessment of happiness is

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formed and expressed mainly under the influence of national and cultural factors (Amirbekova et al. 2013; Andreenkova & Andreenkova, 2019; Bekbenbetova et al., 2022; Helliwell et al., 2024). Some studies conclude that ethnicity is significant and consider the possibility that, for example, Russians are less satisfied with the level of social well-being in general (Zavisca & Hout, 2005). It can be hypothesized that the processes of the formation of Kazakh identity at the current stage in the development of Kazakhstan, the strengthening status of the Kazakh language, and the outflow of a large number of representatives of European ethnic groups from the country can have diametrically opposite effects on the feeling of happiness among ethnic and other Kazakh citizens.

## Conclusion

The study established that, regardless of religiosity, people are most likely to feel happy if they are healthy. The degree of religiosity enhances the differences in the system of interrelations between happiness, people's satisfaction with different aspects of life, and worldview factors. Religious socialization and education play decisive roles for believers and devout believers. The present study is the first to compare the levels of social well-being of devout believers, nominal believers, and nonbelievers in Kazakhstan. Hence, some limitations that need to be considered in future research should be highlighted.

The relatively small size of the subsamples of devout religious and nonreligious people, especially given the wide age range of survey participants, constitutes a limitation of the present study. In interconfessional comparisons of subjective assessments of social well-being, it is also important to use comparable religiosity and spirituality criteria because of the presence of confessional and denominational specificities. Representatives of the wealthiest and poorest groups of the population may be underrepresented in the study sample. This circumstance may distort the results of studies concerning the influence of income, employment, and satisfaction with life circumstances and religious beliefs on the subjective well-being of believers and nonbelievers. When analyzing the happiness of believers, along with their satisfaction with life and its aspects, greater emphasis should be placed on the phenomenology of religious life with the study of value and meaning systems and the subjective religious experience of believers and their existential well-being.

Despite these limitations, we hope that our study offers useful information on differences in the structure of the social well-being of believers and nonbelievers. Further research in the outlined directions will contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationship between happiness and faith. Future studies should examine how religious orientations are understood within the framework of general background culture to examine the connection between religion and well-being in the context of the level of social approval/disapproval of the religious system of norms. Further research should focus not on whether religiosity increases happiness but rather on what factors affect this influence and to which social groups it applies.

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By examining the case of Kazakhstan, the authors contribute to the existing body of literature on the impact of religiosity on happiness and satisfaction with various aspects of personal life. When interpreting the findings, other researchers and readers should be mindful of the limitations highlighted in detail in the conclusion.

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