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The personal and social correlates of spiritual well-being among primary school teachers.

Dr John W Fisher

Research Project Officer, School of Nursing, University of Ballarat, Victoria, Australia

The Revd Professor Leslie J Francis

Director of the Welsh National Centre for Religious Education and Professor of Practical Theology, University of Wales, Bangor, UK

and

The Revd Dr Peter Johnson

Research Associate, Welsh National Centre for Religious Education, University of Wales, Bangor, UK

address for correspondence:

The Revd Professor Leslie J Francis

Welsh Centre for Religious Education

University of Wales, Bangor

Normal Site

Bangor LL57 2PX

Gwynedd, Wales, UK

Telephone: 01248 382566

Fax: 01248 383954

E-mail: L.J.Francis@Bangor.ac.uk

SUMMARY

A sample of 311 primary school teachers completed the Spiritual Health in Four Domains Index alongside the abbreviated revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire and measures of religiosity. The data demonstrate that higher levels of spiritual health are found among older teachers who record low scores on the psychoticism scale and who practise religious faith through church attendance and personal prayer.

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INTRODUCTION

Classical definitions of spirituality tended to concentrate on religious or ecclesiastical matters concerned with the soul. Contemporary studies in spirituality adopt much wider definitions, integrating all aspects of human life and experience (Schneiders, 1986; Muldoon and King, 1995). In recent years spirituality has been linked with health in expressing individual's quality of life in the spiritual dimension (Fehring, Miller and Shaw, 1997). The resultant spiritual well-being is spoken of as an indicator of the individual's spiritual health.

The first recorded expression of the term "spiritual well-being" is attributed to the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (NICA, 1975) which suggested that 'Spiritual well-being is the affirmation of life in relationship with God, self, community and environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness' (reported in Ellison, 1983). Subsequent discussions on spiritual health have referred to these four sets of relationships to varying extents, but no new features have been added to expand the conceptual framework proposed for spiritual well-being by NICA.

Starting with the four sets of relationships outlined by NICA, Fisher (1998) interviewed 98 teachers in a range of state, Catholic and other non-government schools near Melbourne, Australia to ascertain their understanding of the nature of spiritual health. From analysis of the teachers' responses, Fisher (1998) proposed that spiritual health is a fundamental dimension of people's overall health and well-being, permeating and integrating all other dimensions of health (ie physical, mental, social, emotional and vocational). In addition, Fisher argues that spiritual health is a dynamic state of being reflected in the quality of relationships that people have in four domains of human existence, namely with themselves, others, the environment, and something or some-One beyond the human level. Different people embrace these four sets of relationships to varying degrees depending on their world-views and personal beliefs.

Fisher attests that self-awareness provides the inspiration or motivation for people to relate with themselves in terms of finding and expressing meaning, purpose and values in life. Only 3% of the teachers in Fisher's study (1998) felt that the relationship with themselves (ie *personal* domain) was sufficient for their spiritual well-being. The majority of people also expressed the view that in-depth interpersonal relationships enhance their spiritual well-being through the agency of morality and culture and, for some, through religious organisations. In Fisher's model, developing relationships in this *communal* domain builds up as well as builds on the quality of relationships individuals have with themselves in the personal domain of spiritual well-being.

Few Westerners seem to take the time to connect with the environment to enhance their spiritual well-being in the way which appears natural for many indigenous people, whose relationship with the environment enhances, yet builds upon, their personal and communal spiritual well-being. Connecting with a Transcendent Other, or god-type figure, generally results from a motivation of Faith, which is expressed through religious practices, such as church attendance, prayer and/or worship. Rather than contrast this relationship as a vertical one between people and God, with a

horizontal relationship of people with others and environment, Fisher proposed that the relationship with a Transcendent Other would ideally embrace each of the other three domains (ie personal, communal & *environmental*) building them up and at the same time building upon them for an integrated sense of spiritual well-being.

Following on from Fisher's (1998) qualitative study of the domains of spiritual well-being, Fisher, Francis and Johnson (2000) developed the Spiritual Health in Four Domains Index (SH4DI) among a sample of teachers in England. Working from an original pool of 150 items they employed correlational and factor analyses to identify the best sets of six items to assess each of the four domains of spiritual well-being, namely personal well-being, communal well-being, environmental well-being and religious well-being. Their data supports the reliability of the four six-item scales and also the reliability of the overall 24-item measure of spiritual health. Other operationalisations of Fisher's model have been reported (Fisher 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

Fisher's model of spiritual well-being has been employed in a series of studies to begin to chart some of the personal, social and contextual factors associated with enhanced levels of spiritual well-being. For example, a study with 850 secondary school students in state, Catholic, Christian Community and other non-government schools in Victoria, Australia, led to the development of the Spiritual Health And Life-Orientation Measure (SHALOM) which revealed that their relationships with themselves and others were perceived to be of paramount importance for their spiritual well-being (Fisher, 1999). Connecting with the environment was moderately important and the importance of relationship with God for spiritual well-being varied depending on the nature of the school.

An instrument called 'Feeling Good, Living Life' was developed with 1080 primary school student in 14 schools in Victoria and Western Australia (Fisher, 2000a). The most important factor for these students' spiritual well-being was relationships with others, with particular focus on 'family.' Building up self, relating with the environment and with god were also important to these young children. A fifth factor of 'fair play' also featured in expressions of their spiritual well-being (Fisher, 2000a).

Fisher (2000b) examined the staff perceptions of spiritual well-being in state, Catholic and independent schools in Victoria, Australia. He concluded that all of the four sets of relationships (ie, with self, others, environment, and God) were considered important for enhancing the teachers' and students' spiritual well-being. The Catholic school teachers took an holistic approach rating each of the four sets of relationships fairly highly. Teachers in the independent schools took a more dualistic approach rating the God-factor higher, but rating the other three sets of relationships of equal importance to the views expressed by the state school staff.

A survey of factors influencing the spiritual well-being of more than 1600 nursing, education and physical education students in five Australian universities using SHALOM revealed that each of the four sets of relationships, as outlined in Fisher's model, were important for their spiritual well-being (Fisher, 2000c). Significant variations were found in the domains of spiritual well-being by university type, course of study, gender and age of participants.

Against this background, the aim of the present study is to examine personal and social correlates of spiritual well-being among primary school teachers in the UK. In particular the study focuses on five specific areas.

The first area concerns the sex of the teachers. In the UK between 70% and 80% of primary school teachers are female (Francis, 1986). There is perennial debate that the recruitment of more men into primary school teaching is important to broaden the experience of the students. On the other hand, there is some evidence to suggest that the men attracted to primary school teaching display values and attitudes not dissimilar from women primary school teachers (Francis, 1986, 1987). This latter view would predict the lack of significant differences in the spiritual well-being of male and female teachers.

The second area concerns the age of the teachers. Fisher's model of spiritual well-being contains two key elements which promote the hypothesis that spiritual well-being scores may increase with age. The first element focuses on the four domains. Each domain in itself is based on a notion of human maturity which may be enhanced by reflective life experience. The second element focuses on the integration of the four domains. Such integration in itself may be a function of human maturity which increases with age.

The third area concerns religiosity. While Fisher's model of spirituality has been constructed to allow a secular context in which spirituality can be fostered and promoted independently of the major religious traditions, it remains likely that sympathy with major religious traditions continues to enhance spiritual well-being as conceived by Fisher. Given the salience of the Christian tradition in the UK the present study focuses on two explicit markers of Christian practice, namely church attendance as an indicator of extrinsic religiosity and personal prayer as an indicator of intrinsic religiosity.

The fourth area concerns personality. Using Eysenck's dimensional model of personality, a series of recent studies has demonstrated that personality functions as a significant predictor of individual differences in traditional religiosity (see, for example, Francis, Brown, Philipchalk and Lester, 1995). If spiritual well-being functions in ways analogous to traditional religiosity, then it would be predicted that spiritual well-being would also be related to personality. Eysenck's dimensional model of personality argues that individual differences can be most economically and adequately summarised in terms of three higher order factors which are generally described as extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism. Within this framework it is the dimension of psychoticism which is fundamental to individual differences in religiosity (Francis, 1992).

METHOD

Sample

A sample of 311 primary school teachers participated in the project. Of the total respondents, 23% were male and 77% were female; 28% were under the age of 41,

50% were between 41 and 50, 22% between 51 and 60 and 1% were over the age of 60 years.

Measures

Spiritual well-being was assessed by the Spiritual Health in Four Domains Index (Fisher, Francis and Johnson, 2000). This instrument proposes four six-item indices of personal well-being, communal well-being, environmental well-being and religious well-being. Each item is assessed on a five point scale: very little, little, medium, much, very much. The four indices combine to produce a 24 item global measure of spiritual health.

Personality was assessed by the abbreviated revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (EPQR-A: Francis, Brown and Philipchalk, 1992). This instrument proposes four six-item indices of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and lie scale. Each item is assessed on a two point scale: yes, no.

Church attendance was assessed on a four point scale: never, a few times a year, once a month, once a week.

Personal prayer was assessed on a six point scale: never, a few times a year, once a month, once a week, every day, moment by moment.

RESULTS

The five scales proposed by the Spiritual Health in Four Domains Index generated the following alpha coefficients: personal well-being, .78; communal well-being, .70; environmental well-being, .62; religious well-being, .93; spiritual health, .88. The four scales proposed by the abbreviated Revised Eysenck Personality Questionnaire generated the following alpha coefficients: extraversion, .77; neuroticism, .70; psychoticism, .55; lie scale, .66. All these instruments demonstrate a satisfactory level of internal consistency in view of their length. The lower alpha coefficients associated with the psychoticism scale is in line with the findings of other studies and the recognised difficulties in operationalising this dimension of personality (Francis, Philipchalk and Brown, 1991).

Table 1 presents the correlation coefficients between personal well-being, communal well-being, environmental well-being, religious well-being, spiritual health, extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism, lie scale, church attendance, personal prayer, age and sex.

DISCUSSION

Six features of the data presented in Table 1 are worth discussion.

First, the data confirm that not all the sex differences found in the population as a whole are reproduced among male and female primary school teachers. For example, while in the general population women emerge as more religious than men (Francis, 1997), in the present study there is no significant relationship between sex and either church attendance or prayer. While in the general population women record higher neuroticism scores than men (Francis, 1993), in the present study there is no

significant relationship between sex and neuroticism. The absence of these expected sex differences may be attributed to the view that men attracted to the profession of primary school teacher may themselves reflect a higher level of psychological femininity. On the other hand, the correlations between sex and psychoticism scores is in the expected direction (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1976).

In respect of spiritual well-being the only significant correlations with sex occurs in respect of the personal domain. The women place a higher emphasis on the personal domain than the men. Sex differences in spiritual well-being now need to be tested among a group of men and women more representative of the population as a whole.

Second, the data confirm that the age differences in religiosity found in general studies in the psychology of religion (Beit- Hall??? and Argyle, 1997) are reproduced among primary school teachers. In the present study older teachers reported higher levels of both church attendance and personal prayer. This may reflect both generational and cohort effects. The data also demonstrate that age is a significant predictor of three of the four domains of spiritual well-being. The older teachers recorded higher scores than the younger teachers in the domains of religious well-being, environmental well-being and communal well-being, but not in the domain of personal well-being. The overall effect is that the older teachers record higher scores than younger teachers on the global measure of spiritual health.

Third, the pattern of relationships between Eysenck's dimensional model of personality and Christian religiosity identified in a series of previous studies (Francis, Brown, Philipchalk and Lester, 1995; Eysenck, 1998) are reproduced in the present study. The data demonstrate that both church attendance and personal prayer are independent of extraversion and neuroticism. At the same time greater frequency of personal prayer and of church attendance are associated with lower psychoticism scores. This is consistent with Eysenck's broader theory which locates religion within the domain of tenderminded social attitudes and associates low psychoticism scores with conditioning or socialisation into tenderminded social attitudes (Francis, 1992). The positive correlation between both church attendance and prayer and lie scale scores is also consistent with earlier studies. This may reflect an association between religiosity and either social conformity or exemplary scrupulosity (Francis, 1993).

Fourth, the data demonstrate a clear relationship between conventional religiosity and the religious domain of spiritual well-being. Both church attendance and prayer are highly and positively correlated with scores of religious well-being. On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between conventional religiosity and either the communal or the environmental domains of spiritual well-being. While there is a slight positive correlation between church attendance and the personal domain of spiritual well-being there is no association between prayer and this domain. This pattern of relationships supports the view that the domains of spiritual well-being relate to religiosity in different ways. Overall there is a positive relationship between both prayer and church attendance and the global index of spiritual health.

Fifth, further insights into the dimensional nature of spiritual well-being is provided by an examination of the patterns of relationships between the individual scales and Eysenck's dimensional model of personality. No significant relationship emerged

between lie scale scores and any of the five spiritual well-being measures. Spiritual well-being is unrelated to social conformity. No significant relationship emerged between neuroticism scores and any of the five spiritual well-being measures. Spiritual well-being reflects neither emotional lability nor emotional stability. While extraversion scores were unrelated to environmental well-being, religious well-being or global spiritual health, extraverts recorded higher scores than introverts on the personal domain and communal domain. This finding is consistent with the theory that extraverts are more at home in and derive more satisfaction from the social world (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1985). Psychoticism scores were negatively related to the personal, communal and religious domains of spiritual well-being, as well as to the global index of spiritual health, although not to the environmental domain of spiritual well-being. These findings suggest that overall spiritual well-being is associated with the broader field of tenderminded social attitudes.

Finally, the correlation matrix enables a profile to be generated of the primary school teachers who enjoy higher levels of spiritual health. Higher levels of spiritual health are found among older male and female teachers who record low scores on the psychoticism scale and who practice religious faith through church attendance and through personal prayer.

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