LIFE SATISFACTION AND RELIGION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN TURKEY AND GERMANY

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ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the religiosity and life satisfaction in Turkey and Germany with considering moderating role of age, health, and gender. Turkey exhibits high levels of religiosity, while Germany represents a country with more diverse religious population and higher level of secularity. It aims to provide a broad insight on how religiosity determines life satisfaction. It uses data from the 7th wave of the World Values Survey (2017-2022) to create a religiosity index based on how important God is. How often people go to religious services. How frequently they pray and whether they see themselves as religious. People's levels of satisfaction are rated on a 10-point scale to determine their level of life satisfaction. The results demonstrate that both nations' life fulfillment is highly correlated with general health. Those with better health reported higher levels of life satisfaction. Another important determinant is age, especially in Germany where people of older age are more satisfied with their lives. Gender differences are significant in Germany, while in Turkey there are no much distinctions. Nonetheless, women express greater levels of life satisfaction. The finding presented in the study underscores how religiosity interacts with cultural factors and demographic characteristics to predict life satisfaction. These insights can help policymakers, social service professionals, and religious institutions to improve life quality and satisfaction in different cultures and religions. Future research should look into how long-term changes in culture and religion affect people.

Keywords: *Life satisfaction, Religiosity,Turker and Germany.*

INTRODUCTION

Turkey and Germany, with different cultures and degrees of religiosity, make this study more interesting to study the connection between religious belief and satisfaction in life. It is important to compare these two nations to see how religiosity affects life satisfaction, despite the differences in their religious diversification and economic situations. Although several studies investigate the relationship of religion and life satisfaction but still only a few have compared nations with quite distinct religious and cultural background regions. Most of research has done in the same regions in one cultural setting. This study aims to fill this information gap and bring new insights to the comparative research by comparing the link in Turkey and Germany. Religiosity that is often defined as an individual's conviction, devotion, and veneration towards a divinity. It varies significantly between Turkey and Germany. In Turkey, 98.8% of the population identifies with a religious association while 73.7% in Germany. Both countries have different religious compositions. Turkey has 98.0% Muslims while Christians, Hindus and Buddhists are less than 1%. Similarly, in Germany, Christians are 66%, Muslims are 6.9%, Hindus and Buddhists are less than 1% while 26.3 % are unaffiliated with any religion. This difference in the composition of religions offers a unique opportunity to

explore its impact on life satisfaction across distinct cultural and religious contexts. Similarly, Turkey and Germany have diverse cultural contexts. Turkey, predominantly with Muslim population and having rich religious tradition, contrasts sharply with Germany, which is a Western European nation with greater religious diversity and a higher degree of secularization. As Joshanloo (2019) explains that cultural and religious backgrounds have a major impact on how people perceive their life happiness. Specifically, secular cultures focus more on emotional well-being, while religious cultures rely more on religious standards for life evaluation. Moreover, both countries had experienced autocratic rule: Germany had autocratic rule (A system of governance in which a single individual or group possesses absolute power without having any accountability of their decisions and tasks) until the late 1800s. Similarly, during the Ottoman Empire, Turkey also experienced long-term autocratic control. The middle class was weak in both countries, therefore, military held the key positions (Elias & Schröter, 1989). This system remained in Germany until the 1970s, when student movements caused significant changes. However, in Turkey, state brutally stopped the student movements. Comparative historical research underscores the importance of governance structures by examining their long-term effects on societal well-being. This method provides insights into how different governance models shape social, economic, and political development over time. Comparative historical analysis highlights the importance of governance structures on societal well-being (Inglehart & Baker, 2000). Additionally, they both have Late Nation Emergence: Germany and Turkey emerged as unified nations later than many other nations (Kushner, 1977). Furthermore, both nations developed a strong form of nationalism (Arai, 1992; Elias & Schröter, 1989) which grew alongside the acceptance of violence. Likewise, similarity in state formation processes. Both have undergone similar state formation process, characterized by military supremacy, nationalism, with efforts to modernize and consolidate governmental control. These shared historical trajectories provide a common ground for comparing the impact of

religiosity on life satisfaction (Coşkun, 2018). They also have established economic ties. Germany accounts about 25% of total EU commerce with Turkey, making it the country's most significant trading partner. The 2005 marked Turkey's EU membership process which strengthened the country's economic relationship with Germany (İNat, 2016; Institute & Tolksdorf, 2016). These economic ties between Turkey and Germany can significantly contribute to life satisfaction by ensuring financial security, access to better services, and overall economic prosperity. Further, they have similarities in educational institutions. In order to produce responsible citizens, the educational systems in both Germany and Turkey, put a strong emphasis on teaching students according to their set skills. Both systems include a significant number of private schools, extensive multi-phase teacher preparation, mandated schooling durations, and pre-enrollment health exams. They also have similar grading schemes and academic year arrangements (Alphan, 2003).

Literature Review:
Religiosity is defined in different way by different researchers and authors. Iddagoda and Opatha (2017) explain religiosity the belief of a person about its religion and its teachings. Van Praag, (2013) defines religion as a link to the core idea to communicate with a higher realm.
Paldam and Gundlach (2009) see religion through its impact and significance in every part of life and analyze that religiosity tends to decrease as countries develop. Shukor and Jamal (2013) specifically look at the Muslim context, defining religiosity as sticking to religious values and practices and even creating a way to measure this. These definitions of religiosity show different perspectives and cannot defined in a single direction, as it measures beliefs, practices, and impacts on everyday aspects of life. Therefore, the concept of religiosity varies in different studies and this study uses Iddagoda's definition of religiosity. Iddagoda's definition centers on individual belief and practicing religious teachings, which is a universal aspect of religiosity. It can be applied to various cultural and religious contexts like Christian society in Germany and the predominantly Muslim

society in Turkey. This applicability of universality makes Iddagoda's definition of religiosity suitable to use for this comparative study.

Relationship between Religiosity and Life Satisfaction:

A vital component of life satisfaction is psychological well-being, which manifests in numerous aspects of our existence (Meule & Voderholzer, 2020; Yang & Srinivasan, 2016). It involves a constant subjective evaluation of one's life, in which people compare their present circumstances to self-imposed ideals or goals (Sancho et al., 2014). Additionally, it offers an evaluation of the person's general level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with life. Life satisfaction encompasses general sentiments and attitudes toward life as well as one's trust in making progress toward significant life goals and desires (Veenhoven, 2015).

In this study life satisfaction is defined as it is proposed by Meule and Voderholzer (2020): " A thoughtful and thorough evaluation of one's life as a whole". Similarly, the concept presented by Meule and Voderholzer aligns with research and is measured through a question from the World Values Survey (WVS), which asks respondents to provide an overall evaluation of their satisfaction with life on a 10-point scale measurement.

Therefore, the study accepts the given definition of life satisfaction to consider the objective notion of life satisfaction while embracing the fact that people assess satisfaction by their own benchmark. This approach also facilitates cross-cultural comparisons specifically with the intention of capturing the own assessment of the total quality of life.

Because of this, a number of research have looked into the relationship, which show that there is a connection between individual religiosity, cultural factors, and well-being. Many researchers confirm the connection between religiosity and satisfaction with life (Ellison et al., 1989; Mahmood et al., 2017; Ngamaba & Soni, 2018). Thus, the strength and nature of this relationship depend on various moderating factors.

Cultural and National Contexts:

The other important factor presented in the literature is the national culture and religious practices within a specific country. For instance, Lun and Bond (2013) explain that when religious education is prominent in a society, then spiritual activity is associated with life satisfaction. In contrast, in nations with lower levels of religious education, religious activity may have a negative correlation with contentment. This research emphasizes the necessity of taking cultural and social views about religion into account when evaluating its influence on life satisfaction.

Furthermore, it has been demonstrated how much government interference with religious practice and social conflict towards religious groups, affect the relationship between religiousness and well-being. Elliott and Hayward (2009) narrate that in the countries with higher levels of government intervention and limitation of individual freedom, the positive relationship between religious affiliation and subjective wellbeing is higher. Nonetheless, as the government increases regulation, this association usually diminishes, and can even turn negative in countries with strong state control. These show that sociopolitical context and the perception of religion in a society have a significant impact on the association.

A number of cross-sectional investigations have been carried out to determine mediators through which religion influences life satisfaction. Sinnewe et al. (2015) demonstrate that religiosity, as measured by attendance at religious services, positively connected to life satisfaction in West Germany, which is totally mediated by social resources. Likewise, Lim and Putnam (2010) pinpoint the contribution of social resources and social relations within religious affiliations. These communities offer care, meaning and social contact which, in turn, enhances life satisfaction.

Social and Demographic Variables:

Besides social aspects, personal characteristics such as age, gender, and health status have also been widely studied in relation to the connection between religiosity and life satisfaction. Age is particularly relevant as studies show that religiosity tends to increase with age, especially in later life stages when individuals seek greater existential meaning and comfort (Koenig, 2012). Older adults often rely on religious

beliefs and practices to cope with the challenges of aging, such as physical decline, loss of loved ones, and retirement (Mahmood et al. 2017). Therefore, age may moderate the relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction, with older individuals potentially deriving greater life satisfaction from religious engagement than younger individuals (Bejda et al., 2018; Munawar & Tariq, 2018).

Gender is another critical factor. Women report higher levels of religiosity compared to men (Miller & Stark, 2002). Women tend to be more involved in religious activities and often rely on religious communities for emotional and social support (Trzebiatowska & Bruce, 2012). This emotional support increases women's life satisfaction more than men. However, other work suggests that genders, religion and life satisfaction have a positive relationship all the time, and there is not much difference in the connection between genders and religion to life satisfaction (Habib et al., 2018; Mahmood et al., 2017).

Research indicates that individuals in better health are more likely to participate in religious activities and benefit from the social support and sense of belonging provided by religious communities (Ellison et al., 1989). Positive health makes people to be more active in religious activities that may match with high life satisfaction. On the other hand, ill health keeps people away from religious practices and reduces the impact of religious beliefs in boosting up the quality of life (Koenig, 2012). Thus, health status hypothesizes to moderate between religiosity and life satisfaction so that more healthy people should derive relatively major benefits from religious practices.

Contradictory Findings and Null Results:
Surprisingly, some works report negative or non-significant associations between religion and life satisfaction.(Bernardelli et al. (2020) observe no association between either religiosity or attendance at religious services and life satisfaction. Their study even highlights lower satisfaction with life among non-Christians as compared to the non-religious population. Likewise, Mancuso and Lorona (2023) find that life satisfaction has only a tiny positive relationship with religion or spirituality. This relationship is highly context dependent and varies from one context to another or from one sample to another.

A number of works has been done on the general population and some done on the various age groups, however, few works have been done with regard to the religion and life satisfaction among the specific subgroups. Akbayram and Keten (2024) find that Muslim medical students are satisfied than other non-Muslim students and also find that there is a correlation between religiosity of Muslim students with their life satisfaction. This finding indicates that religion may affect the well-being of a person in various manner depending on the cultural, religious and profession settings.

In many cases, it is claimed that there is a positive connection between religiosity and life satisfaction. Although this connection is not simple, and depends on the existence of multiple, contextual and individual conditions. These may include age, religious denomination, national culture, sociopolitical environment. Future studies in these and other moderators are needed to achieve a better understanding of the delicate relationships between faith, ethnicity, and well-being.

Data and methods:
The most recent data from the World Value Survey's 7th wave (2017–2022) is great for understanding current trends and relationships. Turkey and Germany took part in this wave (2017-2018). Same methods and questions used in all countries, making comparisons reliable. Using data from one wave ensures that any differences or similarities are not due to changes in the survey design. This study utilizes two theoretical frameworks. These frameworks offer valuable insights into the possible connections between religiosity and satisfaction with life, as well as impact of cultural values on relationship.

According to the Religious Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997), religion can help people to deal with life's challenges. This theory suggests that being part of a religion, practicing religious activities, and holding religious beliefs can boost one's quality of life and well-being. Well-being, as defined by(Meiselman (2016), is the balance between

feeling good and bad and overall life satisfaction.

The Religious Coping Theory is especially relevant to this study since it looks at how religion might affect life satisfaction through processes based on meanings (like following religious teachings) and control (like overcoming challenges). However, the outcomes and impacts in the form of positive or negative depends on an individual's specific beliefs and practices.

This study uses another theory called Cultural Value Theory (Schwartz, 2006), which defines how cultural values affect people's attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. It is particularly useful in understanding potential cultural variations and its impact on relationship between life satisfaction and religiosity.

The religiosity index as adopted in this study is developed from Iddagoda's definition. It encompasses a number of variables that fit this conceptualization including the following; belief in God, church service attendance, prayer frequency, and religious self-identifier. These indicators are relevant to an individual's religious conviction and practices. Therefore, the index is an appropriate measure for the levels of religiosity in both cultural settings.

Dependent Variable (Life Satisfaction):

The dependent variable of this study is life satisfaction, which is assessed using this question from the WVS;

Q49: "Taking everything into account, how pleased are you with your life overall these days? How pleased are you with your life overall? On a card with 1 representing "totally unhappy" and 10 representing "absolutely pleased," where would you set your score?"

This is a 10-point scale question, which shows the general educational estimation of the vital conditions of the respondents that complies with the notion of life satisfaction used in the study.

Independent Variable (Religiosity):

The independent variable of interest is religiosity, which measures as a multidimensional construct captured by the following questions from the WVS;

Q164: "What role does God have in your life? Please suggest using this scale. One represents "not at all important" and ten indicates "very important".

Q171: "What is the frequency of your attendance at religious services these days, excluding marriage and funerals?"

Q172: "Apart from weddings and funerals, how often do you pray?"

Q173: "Would you describe yourself as a religious person, not a religious person, or an atheist, regardless of whether you attend religious services or not?"

Discussion and result:

In the following sections, the descriptive statistics findings for Turkey and Germany are discussed in relation to the research aims and objectives. The research discusses the relationship between satisfaction with life and religion in the broader context of the study.

Descriptive Statistics for Turkey
Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for Turkey

Variable	Min	Q1	Median	Mean	Q3	Max
Life Satisfaction (Q49_recoded)	1	3	3	2.794139	3	3
Importance of God (Q164_recoded)	1	1	2	1.923517	3	3
Attendance at Religious Services (Q171_recoded)	1	1	1	1.649750	2	4
Frequency of Prayer (Q172_recoded)	1	1	1	1.633310	2	3
Religious Self-identification (Q173_recoded)	1	2	2	2.371694	3	3
Health Status (Q47_recoded)	1	2	3	2.751251	3	4
Age (Q262_recoded)	1	2	3	2.338813	3	3
Marital Status (Q273_recoded)	1	1	1	1.525375	2	3
Educational Level (Q275_recoded)	1	2	2	2.238027	3	3
Income Level (Q288_recoded)	1	2	2	2.073624	2	3

Descriptive Statistics for Germany:
In Germany mean for life satisfaction is 2.79 on the 1 to 3 scale, an indication of being generally well. Religiosity is at low to medium level as expressed by the Importance of God,

with the mean of 1.92 and Frequency of Prayer with the mean of 1.63. While, attendance to religious services is also infrequent, with its mean 1.65, indicates highly secular culture. However, Religious Self-identification with mean of 2.37 indicating that there is a portion of the population which is still religious.

Health is playing a vital role for life satisfaction as mean score is 2.75 (on a 1–4 scale), indicating that most respondents are in good health align with life satisfaction. The age distribution (mean = 2.34) skews toward middle-aged and older adults which report higher satisfaction. The mean for the educational attainment is 2.23, while that for income level is 2.07. This indicates that many people are educated and earning average incomes in Germany. Life satisfaction depends more on health status, age and overall socio-economic stability than religiosity. This aligns with secular and diversified cultural setting of Germany.

**Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Germany**

Variable	Min	Q1	Median	Mean	Q3	Max
Life Satisfaction (Q49_recoded)	1	2	3	2.487793	3	3
Importance of God (Q164_recoded)	1	3	3	2.735426	3	3
Attendance at Religious Services (Q171_recoded)	1	2	2	2.313403	3	4
Frequency of Prayer (Q172_recoded)	1	2	3	2.527155	3	3
Religious Self-identification (Q173_recoded)	1	2	3	2.727952	3	3
Health Status (Q47_recoded)	1	2	3	2.847035	3	4
Age (Q262_recoded)	1	1	2	1.939711	2	3
Marital Status (Q273_recoded)	1	1	1	1.665670	3	3
Educational Level (Q275_recoded)	1	1	1	1.575486	2	3
Income Level (Q288_recoded)	1	2	2	2.110613	3	3

Life Satisfaction Distribution in Turkey:

Life Satisfaction Distribution in Turkey
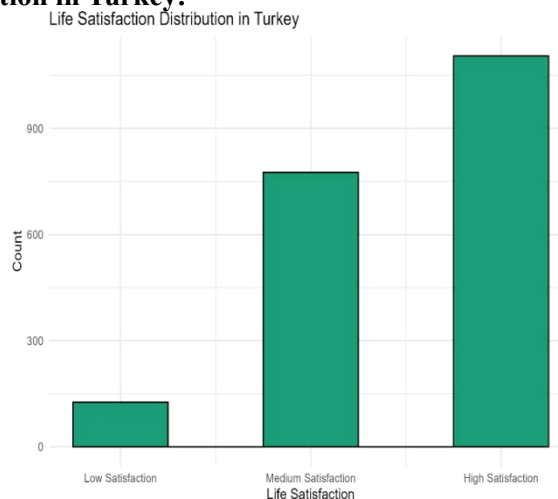
The largest percentage of about 900 report satisfaction with the standard of living as being high. For the second largest, medium Satisfaction is the given response, stating that quite a number of respondents have life Satisfaction in the middle level. Only few reported low, meaning the greatest proportion of this sample population showed life satisfaction above the middle point in the scale

Life Satisfaction Distribution in Germany
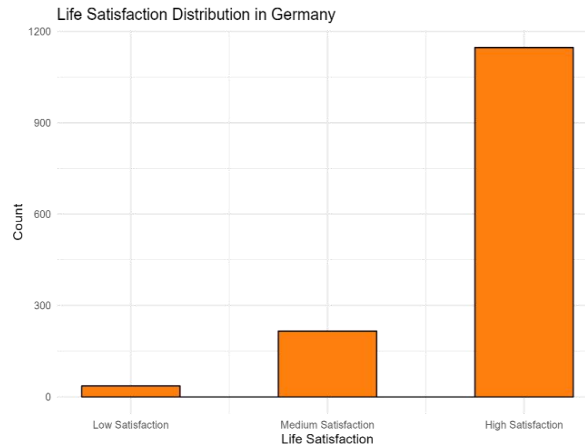
Life Satisfaction Distribution in Germany:
The "High Satisfaction" category, with about 1,200 people, again is the most chosen, hence a very high level of life satisfaction for most participants. The "Medium Satisfaction" category has a moderate frequency but a little lower than that in the first graph. Hence reflecting fewer participants with moderate life satisfaction in this group. "Low Satisfaction" remains small, signifying that only a few participants are dissatisfied with their lives.

Religiosity Index and Life Satisfaction in Turkey
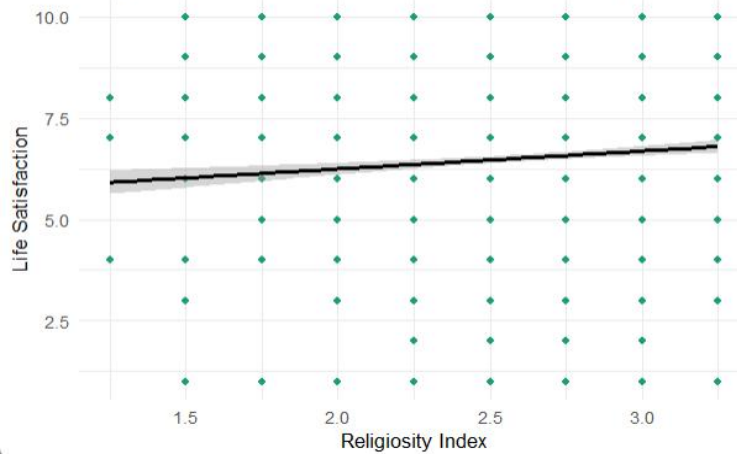
Correlation between Religiosity Index and Life Satisfaction:
In Turkey, the relationship is positive: increasing life satisfaction goes with higher religiosity, although the effect is small. A spread of dispersion in data indicates that variation in the scores of life satisfaction. Hence other factors related to religiosity also influence life satisfaction significantly.

Religiosity Index and Life Satisfaction in Germany
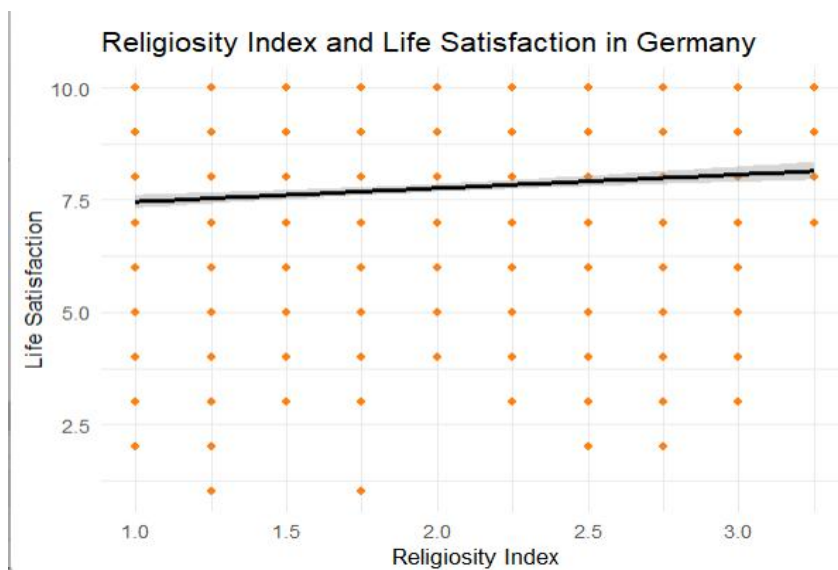
Whereas the relationship of religiosity to life satisfaction in Germany is relatively weak and not strongly statistically significant. This means that religiosity affects the life satisfaction level only a little. However, the people with low, moderate, and high religious involvement reported high level for life satisfaction, which show a generally high trend among population.

Regression Analysis Result for Turkey:
Table 3: Regression Analysis for Turkey

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	1.208446	0.142730	8.467	<2e-16 ***
religiosity index	0.074794	0.034184	2.188	0.0288 *
Q260	-0.003538	0.026432	-0.134	0.8935
Q262_recoded	0.024363	0.021393	1.139	0.2549
Q47_recoded	0.243496	0.018551	13.125	<2e-16 ***
Q275_recoded	-0.011046	0.018361	-0.602	0.5475
Q288_recoded	0.188845	0.021016	8.986	<2e-16 ***
Q273_recoded	-0.017827	0.016968	-1.051	0.2936

The findings reveal that religiosity positively impacts life satisfaction, with a 0.075-point increase for every one-point rise in the religiosity index (p = 0.0288), confirming the hypothesis in Turkey's religious context. Health status and income significantly influence life satisfaction, with an increase of 0.243 (p < 0.001) and 0.188 points (p < 0.001), respectively, for each unit increase. However, no significant relationships are observed for gender (p = 0.8935), age (p = 0.2549), education level (p > 0.05), or marital status (p = 0.2936). These results underscore the importance of enhancing healthcare and financial security to boost life satisfaction in Turkey.

Regression Analysis Result for Germany
Table 4: Regression Analysis Results for Germany.

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(>|t|)
(Intercept)	2.012365	0.096069	20.947	< 2e-16 ***
religiosity_index	0.033838	0.017554	1.928	0.05410
Q260	0.045709	0.023231	1.968	0.04932 *
Q262_recoded	-0.002558	0.016527	-0.155	0.87703
Q47_recoded	0.128361	0.014166	9.061	< 2e-16 ***
Q275_recoded	0.003155	0.019062	0.166	0.86856
Q288_recoded	0.175398	0.019110	9.178	< 2e-16 ***
Q273_recoded	-0.045398	0.015400	-2.948	0.00325 **

The analysis shows that health status (coefficient = 0.128, p < 2e-16) and income (coefficient = 0.175, p < 2e-16) are significant positive predictors of life satisfaction in Germany, while marital status is inversely related to life satisfaction (coefficient = -0.045, p < 0.01). There are significant gender differences, with a coefficient of 0.046 and p < 0.05, where females report slightly higher satisfaction. Religiosity has a marginal positive effect, with a coefficient of 0.034 and p = 0.0541. Age and education are insignificant, p = 0.877 and p = 0.869, respectively. These results suggest that well-being might be improved by better health and economic conditions, though marital and gender differences require further explanation.

Interaction Effects on Life Satisfaction in Turkey and Germany:

Turkey:

Health status is a dominant predictor of life satisfaction, with a highly significant coefficient of 0.911 (p < 2e-16). Religiosity and an interaction with any of the three variables of age, health status, or gender has no significant effect, with a coefficient for religiosity of 0.297 and p-value of 0.278. Like these, the coefficient for age, -0.030, p = 0.931, or the coefficient for gender, 0.003, p = 0.970. Because of this, health improvements can be the best strategy that effectively raises the level of life satisfaction in Turkey.

Germany:

The health status in Germany is a critical determinant with a highly significant coefficient: 0.837, p < 1.31e-08. Such factors as age showed a positive significant influence, the coefficient being 0.187 and p = 0.0012. It is possible to judge the impact of religiosity as marginally positive because of its coefficient 0.400 at p = 0.059. At the same time, the factor of gender significantly influences life satisfaction. The corresponding coefficient is 0.183, while p = 0.030. The interaction terms of religiosity with the age or health status, or gender, are not significant. Therefore, there are no significant interaction effects on life satisfaction. The findings point out the crucial roles of health and age for life satisfaction in Germany.

Endogeneity and Reverse Causality Concerns:

The results confirm that age and health status are the strongest predictors of life satisfaction in Germany. Health status is associated with estimate 0.837 (p < 1.31e-08), showing life satisfaction increases by 0.837 units with health increases by one unit, supporting the previous statement which describes that physical well-being and life satisfaction are highly connected. Similarly, age has a significant positive effect (Estimate = 0.187, p = 0.0012) showing that older individuals report higher satisfaction. Gender (Q260) has a small but significant independent effect (Estimate = 0.183, p = 0.030).

The contribution of religiosity (Religiosity Index) with an Estimate = 0.034 (p = 0.054) is small and positive, reflecting the minor role of this variable in a secular context such as Germany. The findings underline that health and age are dominant over religiosity and show minor gender differences that are worthy for further exploration.

Conclusion:

This study confirms that religiosity positively correlates with life satisfaction in both Turkey and Germany in the light of Religious Coping Theory (Pargament, 1997). However, religiosity plays a stronger role in Turkey, which is a religious society as compared to Germany, where its influence is marginal. In both countries, health status become the strongest predictor of life satisfaction besides age and gender. Life satisfaction in Germany increases with age and women having slightly higher level of satisfaction, which requires further studies to explore the socio demographic differences.

This study has limitations of a cross-sectional design and need longitudinal research to explore other factors like socioeconomic status, rural-urban differences on the relationship of life satisfaction and religiosity. This research assists policymakers to develop culturally appropriate well-being programs and assists migrants to make their priorities culturally and religiously sensitive. Other stakeholders include the business organizations, the researchers and the community organizations can also benefit from this research findings by developing different polices, conducting cultural

comparative studies and addressing the health and social challenges appropriately.

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