Finding the Abundant Life: An Academic Perspective

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Finding the Abundant Life: An Academic Perspective

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The Old Testament portrayed the life of the believer as one characterized by the presence of God’s blessing (e.g., see Deut. 28-30). The abundant life is most succinctly summarized in the Old Testament blessing and greeting, “Shalom.” While difficult to briefly define, shalom may be viewed as comprehensive wellbeing, wellbeing in the social, emotional, physical and spiritual dimensions of life.

Jesus said “I came that they may have life, and may have it more abundantly” (Jn. 10:10b, NKJV). While the New Testament has no precise counterpart to shalom, Paul’s characteristic greeting at the beginning of the Pauline Epistles, e.g., “Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 1:3), conveys much of the same concern for the wellbeing of his readers.

If a life of submission and obedience to God is blessed in this comprehensive way, might there be empirical evidence which would support the view that Godly living is accompanied, in general, by human welfare? This is the question which we will consider today as we examine a body of research conducted over the past 25 years investigating the relationship between various social indicators and human welfare. We will focus chiefly on the investigation of spiritual health as operationalized by the Spiritual Wellbeing Scale, developed by Craig Ellison and Ray Paloutzian (Paloutzian & Ellison, 1979, Ellison, 1982).
Outline

1. Introduction (above)
2. Objective indicators
3. Subjective wellbeing
4. Spiritual wellbeing concept
5. Spiritual Wellbeing Scale
6. Empirical correlates of Spiritual Wellbeing
7. Practical implications

Details

1. Introduction (above)

2. Objective indicators

Research: poverty, social alienation assoc/w delinquency & crime

US govt- social indicators movement 1960’s/1970’s education, income, employment, health, housing => quality of life

Kennedy-Johnson era: guns & butter/social programs paradox: social unrest, crime, D&A use, family fragmentation increasing

“… not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.” (Lu. 12:15b)

3. Subjective Wellbeing

Focus on pos, neg affect, happiness, life satisfaction

( Bradburn, 1969; Campbell, 1976, 1981; Diener, 1984; Gurin, Veroff & Feld, 1960 )
4. Religion and wellbeing

Gallup (1980) and others: importance of religion in wellbeing among aged.

David Moberg, sociologist at Marquette (WI) 70’s-80’s: theory of importance of religion in wellbeing

Campbell (1976) gave little importance to religion in wellbeing; re-analysis suggested religion more important (Haddaway, 1978; Hadaway & Roof, 1978; McNamara & St. George, 1979); => need to measure, study religious dimension

Power or religious factors to predict social behavior such as D&A abuse, violence, sexual conduct (Gorsuch, 1988) gives further support.

5. Spiritual wellbeing concept

Related to physical, psychological, intellectual functioning concept vs operation

concept vs operation

inadequacy of any operation

operation as indicator-more or less adequate

temperature, blood pressure, pulse as indicators of health

6. Spiritual Wellbeing Scale (Ellison, 1983)

20 items

6-point continuum from strongly agree-strongly disagree

two dimensions: relationship with God

relationship with world
7. **Empirical correlates of Spiritual Wellbeing (75 + studies)**

   - Psychological health: neg to pathology/pos to health indices
   - Physical health: pos to health, coping with disease
   - Religious measures: pos rel/w
     - Christian profession
     - Freq attendance
     - Freq devotions
     - Importance of relig
     - Spiritual Maturity Scale, ROS, SLQI, REL, COG

8. **Group Differences (Bufford, Paloutzian & Ellison, 1991)**

   - Born Again > Ethical > Non-Christian;
   - Evangelical > Mainline;
   - Normals > counseling clients;
   - Christian sociopathic convicts . Non-Christian sociopathic convicts

9. **Practical Implications**
References


