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**N Sherrin Sophia**  
Head, PG and Research  
Department of Social Work,  
Shrimati Indira Gandhi  
College, Tiruchirappalli,  
Tamilnadu, India

**G Kavitha**  
II MSW, PG and Research  
Department of Social Work,  
Shrimati Indira Gandhi  
College, Tiruchirappalli,  
Tamilnadu, India

**Correspondence**  
**N Sherrin Sophia**  
Head, PG and Research  
Department of Social Work,  
Shrimati Indira Gandhi  
College, Tiruchirappalli,  
Tamilnadu, India

## A study on religious attitude among Ayyappan devotees

**N Sherrin Sophia and G Kavitha**

### Abstract

Religious attitude tend to have a greater impact on individuals personal life, occupation, physical and mental health, attitude towards others, interaction pattern. Ayyappan devotees 17 to 60 years of age, who were visiting Sabarimalai in the month of December 2016 and residents of Tiruchirappalli comprises the Universe for the present study. As there is no specific association for Ayyappan devotees in Tiruchirappalli, the researcher was unable to decide the total number of devotees. Thus the data was collected from sixty respondents through purposive sampling technique. A Self prepared interview schedule along with Religious attitude scale developed by Prof Rajamanickam was used to collect the data from the respondents. The religious attitude was found to be high among the respondents.

**Keywords:** Religious attitude, Ayyappan devotees, religion

### 1. Introduction

In studying the relationship of religious attitude and human behaviors it is not necessary to assume any position about the ontological reality of God or the spiritual realm. Religious beliefs and attitudes or behaviors are associated with physical health and mental health outcomes, regardless of the type of religion people follow. Religious attitude tend to have a greater impact on individuals personal life, occupation, physical and mental health, attitude towards others, interaction pattern. Several studies indicate that spiritual ability preserves humanity and also heals several health issues. The more a person has positive attitude towards religion the more accommodating and happy the person leads his life. In India Ayaan devotees visit Sabarimalai a sacred and popular place in South India during the month of December. Devotees follow special rituals and strictly adopt not to eat Non vegetarian food, maintain personal hygiene, avoid consuming alcohol, drugs, sexual relationship with spouse, walk with bare foot, fast and many more. Even chronic alcoholics strictly avoid consuming alcohol during the pilgrimage. They lead a very different pattern of life, relaxed and, transcendental, their mind mostly occupied with the thoughts of the Supreme Truth. This shows a strong religious attitude among the devotees. Harold G. Koenig *et al.*, (1998)<sup>[3]</sup> examined the relationship between religious activities and cigarette smoking in community-dwelling older adults. Cigarette smoking and religious activities were assessed in a probability sample of 3968 persons age 65 years or older participating in the Duke Populations for Epidemiologic Studies of the Elderly (PEESE) survey. Cross-sectional analyses revealed that participants who frequently attended religious services were significantly less likely to smoke cigarettes at all three waves. Likewise, elders frequently involved in private religious activity were less likely to smoke. Religiously active persons are less likely to smoke cigarettes, and if they do smoke, smoke fewer cigarettes. Tavares. B.F (2004)<sup>[6]</sup> carried out a study in Brazil involving a representative sample of 2,410 students in a medium-sized city found that, after adjusting for confounding variables, the absence of religious practices was associated with a 30% higher drug use in comparison to students with religious practices. Dalgarrondo P.,(2004)<sup>[2]</sup> conducted a Brazilian study involving 2,287 students in a large metropolitan area, religious factors were strongly associated with lower drug use during the month prior to the interview, even after controlling for the relevant socio-demographic and educational variables. Students who did not receive a religious education in childhood underwent a higher use of ecstasy (OR 4.2) and abuse of medicines (OR 3.15) compared to students who had a highly religious education. The lack of religious affiliation was associated with higher cocaine (OR 2.9) use and medicines (OR 2.2) abuse. Moreira A *et al.*(2006)<sup>[5]</sup> conducted a study to assess the relationship between religiosity and mental health.

They found that higher levels of religious involvement are positively associated with indicators of psychological well-being (life satisfaction, happiness, positive affect, and higher morale) and with less depression, suicidal thoughts and behavior, drug/alcohol use/abuse. Usually the positive impact of religious involvement on mental health is more robust among people under stressful circumstances (the elderly, and those with disability and medical illness). There is evidence that religious involvement is usually associated with better mental health. Jesse D E *et al.* (2004)<sup>[4]</sup> studied the relationships of spirituality and psychosocial well-being to health risk behaviors in pregnant Appalachian women through a descriptive study of 120 women between 16 and 28 weeks of pregnancy. The instruments used were the Spiritual Perspective Scale and religiosity items from the Jarel Well-Being Scale. Psychosocial well-being was measured by the Prenatal Psychosocial Profile. Four items measured health risk behaviors. It was observed that higher levels of spirituality (spiritual perspective and religiosity) were significantly correlated with greater satisfaction with social support, higher levels of self-esteem, and decreased levels of smoking. Aghili. M and Kumar. G. V (2008)<sup>[1]</sup> conducted a study on feeling of happiness among Iranian population. The sample consists 1491 employees of which 744 were males and 747 were female. Religious attitude was measured by using Rajmanickam's Religious Attitude Scale and happiness was measure with The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire by Hills & Argyle. The revealed that religious attitude were found to be highly correlated with Happiness. Higher the religious attitude, higher was the happiness. Though religion as played a vital role in the life's of Indian people, research on religious attitude of Ayyappan devotees have not been carried out. Most of the research portraits spirituality, religious attitude of various groups of people, religion and health, religion and treatment. Many were repetition of similar concepts. Because of this tautology, the researcher considered to carry out a research study on religious attitude of Ayyappan Devotees.

### 1.1 Objectives

- To study the sociodemographic details of the respondents.
- To assess the religious attitude among the respondents.

### 2. Methods and Materials

Ayyappan devotees 17 to 60 years of age, who were visiting Sabarimalai in the month of December 2016 and residents of Tiruchirappalli comprises the Universe for the present study. As there is no specific association for Ayyappan devotees in Tiruchirappalli, the researcher was unable to decide the total number of devotees. Thus the data were collected from 60 respondents through purposive sampling technique. A Self prepared interview schedule along with Religious attitude scale developed by Prof Rajmanickam was used to collect the data from the respondents.

### 2.1 Major Findings

The findings revealed that 35% were above 31 years of age. 42% per cent were undergraduates. 77% belong to nuclear family. 62% were from rural background. 48% were working in private companies. 45% of the respondents monthly income ranges above Rs 10,000. 50% were married. 45% reported that they witnessed testimonies of others which inspired them to become an Ayyappan

devotee. 45% of the respondents were devotees for more than 5years. 70% reported that they do not consume alcohol during the pilgrimage. While analysing how they would cope with the urge to drink or as intense thoughts about alcoholism 35% reported that they would dissuade the thought by actively involving themselves in group worship, singing devotional songs and so on. 40% said that they had a sense of self satisfaction after the visit. 52% of the respondents reported that they had developed good attitude like humanity.

With regard to religious attitude it was observed that 60 per cent of the respondents religious attitude was found to be high. There is no significant difference between the respondents marital status and with religious attitude. There is no significant association between age of the respondents and religious attitude. There is no significant association between educational qualification of the respondents and religious attitude. There is a significant variance between the age of the respondents and with religious attitude. There is a no significant variance between the educational status of the respondents and with religious attitude.

### 3. Discussion

Having a positive attitude towards ones religion can make a disorganized man to an organized human being. Teaching the importance of religion should start from home. Parents should practice children to follow their respective religion and follow the Holy Scriptures which would help in promoting moral values. Religion can play a vital role in treating diseases. Having a positive attitude towards any religion can make a sick person have inner healing and positive attitude towards health and life. Several studies shows that having a positive attitude towards religion have healed deadly diseases like cancer, skin diseases, alcoholism and several diseases including mental illness . Religious attitude of person can also be used as a mode of treating sick people.

Ayyappan devotees control consumption of alcohol and smoking habit during their pilgrimage visit to Sabarimalai, this have surprised psychologist and medical practitioners. It shows a strong religious attitude among the respondents.

Medical practitioners and researchers should observe these attitudes for further research and could utilize such positive religious attitude of people, despite of their religious background, for treating and preventing alcoholism, substance abuse and also in promoting positive wellbeing.

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