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Spirituality and Religiousness of Secondary School Students in a Public and Catholic School

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Abstract

Research objectives: The aim of this article is to investigate and analyse spirituality and religiousness in secondary school students of a public and a Catholic school.

Research methods: The diagnostic survey method with a questionnaire was applied in the empirical research. The empirical data was collected with the authors' original questionnaire on spirituality and religiousness of youth, based on publications by Janusz Mariański and Halina Mielicka. The following statistical methods were used to analyse the research material: Student's t-test, χ^2 correlation test, Fisher's exact test, one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Tukey's post hoc test and Fisher's linear trend test. A p-level of <0.05 was considered statistically significant and a p-level of <0.01 was considered highly significant.

Structure of the article: The spirituality and religiousness of young people is an important issue in school education. Therefore, the article discusses,

with reference to the literature on the subject, the basic concepts of spirituality and religiousness. The status of the existing research is shown. The methodological assumptions of our own research are discussed, as well as the characteristics of the study group with respect to the division into a public and a Catholic school. The results and statistical analysis, as well as the limitations of the research, are presented. Finally, general conclusions from the research are presented.

Research results: The research was conducted in 2023. a total of 555 secondary school students participated in the study, including 341 (61.44%) from a Catholic school and 214 (38.56%) from a public school in Krakow. There were more females (58.74%) than males (41.26%) in the study group. Most of the young people (54.95%) declared that they are believers, and most of the believers (85.41%) declared that they are Catholic. The results on the spirituality scale differed significantly ($p < 0.05$) between the groups; they were higher among the Catholic school students. Similarly, scores on the religiousness scale were highly significantly different ($p < 0.01$) between the groups and higher in the Catholic school.

Conclusions and recommendations: Based on the study significant relationships were observed between the type of school and the level of spirituality and religiousness, as well as between the declaration of faith and the level of spirituality and religiousness. The results of the research indicate that spirituality and religiousness are related to each other. Undoubtedly, attending a religious school can be a valuable contribution to developing the religious/spiritual sphere in a young person. It would be worthwhile to conduct further, detailed research on adolescents' religiousness and spirituality in future in order to better understand and describe this issue.

Keywords: spirituality, religiousness, secondary school youth, public school, Catholic school

Introduction

The modern “city without God” is transforming into a “city with many gods”. Spirituality and religiousness mix with each other in the post-modern world, and the two forms often intermingle. This is particularly noticeable in the lives of young people. In Poland, Church-orientated religion is still present. The irreligious sacrum, on the other hand, appears and develops in those areas in which religion is not active. Therefore, it is worth asking about the spirituality and religiousness of secondary school students in public and Catholic schools.

Basic notions

Spirituality can be understood in different ways. James Wiseman, for example, distinguishes between three ways of understanding the concept. The first defines spirituality as the ability to transcend oneself so as to attain ultimate value. The second is defined by the search for unity with the whole world, in experiencing one’s true self. The third is related to the Christian understanding of mystical unity with God (Wiseman, 2009, p. 24). When describing the meaning of spirituality, Halina Mielicka distinguishes between three areas of the phenomenon. The first refers to the religious sphere, the second to the sphere of personality and the third to the sphere of intellect and knowledge. On this basis, she distinguishes three ways of understanding the concept of spirituality in the contemporary world: as religiousness (transcendent spirituality), as a developed personality (transgressive spirituality) and as intellect (gnostic spirituality) (Mielicka, 2017, p. 28). Spirituality encompasses very diverse content: self-acceptance, the search for the meaning of life, the ability to dedicate oneself to others and values, the intense experience of beauty, the recognition of the sacredness of nature, the bond with people, nature and the cosmos, the meditative experience, or the bond with the divine.

Religiousness is linked to experiencing a specific relationship with the sacrum. We can draw conclusions on religiousness from elements such as

religious awareness and feelings, religious decisions, ties to the community, religious practices, morality, religious experiences and forms of religious life (Walesa, 2020, p. 18). Colloquially speaking, religiousness has two aspects: “supernatural”, which is difficult to operationalise, and “natural”, which can be studied empirically. Janusz Mariański, an outstanding Polish sociologist and researcher of religiousness, lists the following areas of research: denominational and religious affiliation, religious beliefs (the issue of dogma), religious practices (obligatory, such as attending Sunday services or confession, or optional, such as prayer or participating in religious lessons), as well as issues of marital and family morality (Mariański, 2023).

Research status

A new trend regarding spirituality and religiousness, especially among young people, is the departure from “external” manifestations or institutional forms. This may entail different levels of spirituality and religiousness, especially with regard to declared religious affiliation. Mariański (2021) says:

While, in the past, religiousness and spirituality were defined, to some extent, in a complementary manner, and religious and ecclesiastical institutions specified the limits of the manifestation of spirituality, as well as the forms and shapes in which it could appear, now the two realities are becoming separate, and the new spirituality no longer refers to any religious doctrines. It is shaped, to a certain extent, in the interior of a person, according to his/her individual needs. (p. 42)

Halina Mielicka (2011b) believes that “new religiousness” is inseparable from “the new spirituality”. She writes that

the so-called new spirituality, the spirituality of the late 20th and early 21st centuries, is understood as people’s struggle with technicalization, secularization, economic and industrial globalization, media and political manipulation, cultural homogenization, and the ecological

disaster caused by environmental destruction. Young people are especially interested in spirituality perceived not so much as an idea, but rather as a spiritual experience. (p. 9)

This spiritual experience, connected with the sphere of feelings, promotes making a direct connection of a believer with supernatural forces which are defined by the notion of sacrum. A believer, through individual religious practices – which include contemplation and meditation – wants to make contact with the sacrum, wants to get closer to what they consider sacred. Thus, mysteriousness and the constant desire to discover the force that governs the world is the essence of spirituality understood as the religiousness of modern man. Because of modern people's interest in what is impossible to understand, spirituality becomes one of the parameters of postmodernity (Mielicka, 2011a, p. 217).

Sławomir Mandes and Maria Rogaczewska (2012) also claim that the so-called "internal religiousness", disconnected from institutions of any kind, is beginning to dominate among young people. Studying the religiousness of young Poles, these authors believe that we are not facing a crisis of faith, but rather a kind of "purification" of religiousness from feudalism, institutional pride, clericalism and hierarchical rigidity. They write that

it's not that young people don't want to hear about God; on the contrary – they long for a living experience of God – but they want it not to be mediated by ecclesiastical formalism, bureaucracy, rigid ecclesiastical language, incomprehensible sermons, and extortion of power and authority which are unsupported by humility and wisdom. (Mandes & Rogaczewska, 2012, p. 23)

Methodological assumptions

The main research question is expressed in the question, "What do spirituality and religiousness look like among secondary school students in a public and a Catholic school?" Also, the following detailed questions

were formulated: Is there a significant difference in the levels of spirituality among secondary school students in a public school and a Catholic school? Is there a significant difference in levels of religiousness among secondary school students in a public school and a Catholic school? Do declarations of religious affiliation differentiate spirituality and religiousness among secondary school students in a public school and a Catholic school?

The following hypotheses were put forward: There are significant differences in the scales of spirituality and religiousness between the students of public school and Catholic school (the latter are more spiritual and religious). There is a significant relationship between spirituality and religiousness and declarations of religious affiliation.

The empirical research¹ used the method of diagnostic survey with a questionnaire. a questionnaire on the spirituality and religiousness of adolescents, based on the publications of Janusz Mariański and Halina Mielicka, was used. The original questionnaire for the analysis of spirituality and religiousness is based on the study of spirituality conducted by Halina Mielicka-Pawłowska and Sławomir Chrost (Chrost, 2013, 2020), on the study of religiousness carried out by the Centre for Public Opinion Research, and on the analysis of religiousness by Janusz Mariański (2023). For the purpose of our study, a four-degree measurement of four selected aspects of spirituality (bond with God, meaning of life, bond with people, and bond with nature and the cosmos), and three aspects of religiousness (participation in community and individual religious practices and contact with religious communities/groups or organisations) was adopted. Responses were given on a 4-point scale from *often* to *never*. Each answer was scored accordingly: *often* – 3, *sometimes* – 2, *rarely* – 1 and *never* – 0.

The research was conducted in October and November 2023 in compliance with all national and international ethical standards. Approval was obtained from the relevant authorities to conduct the survey in selected

¹ The authors' research dealt with a broader issue. This article presents selected research results relating only to the spirituality and religiousness of adolescents.

Krakow secondary schools. The questionnaire was made available on the Google platform. The request to complete the questionnaire was preceded by a letter outlining the purpose and scope of the research and providing a link to the tool. Participation in the research was anonymous and voluntary, and the participants could opt out of completing and submitting responses at any time.

After verifying and selecting the data, a total of 555 correctly completed survey questionnaires were finally qualified for quantitative statistical analysis. Statistical analysis was carried out using the statistical package PQStat, version 1.8.4.152. Qualitative variables (e.g. religious affiliation) were compared between the two groups using the χ^2 correlation test and Fisher's exact test. Quantitative variables (e.g. spirituality and religiousness) were compared between the two groups using Student's t-test. Spirituality and religiousness scales with regard to religious affiliation were analysed by one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Tukey's post hoc test and Fisher's linear trend test. a p-level of <0.05 was considered statistically significant, and a p-level of <0.01 was considered highly significant.

Characteristics of the study group

A purposive selection of people for the study was made: the request to fill in the questionnaire was addressed to adolescents studying at a selected Catholic secondary school and a public secondary school in Krakow. a total of 555 secondary school students participated in the study, including 341 (61.44%) Catholic high school students and 214 (38.56%) public high school students. Taking into account the variables of gender and age, detailed characteristics of the respondents are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Basic data concerning the participants, by type of school

Variable	Total		Type of school			
			Public		Catholic	
Sex	N	%	N	%	N	%
Male	229	41.26%	100	46.73%	129	37.83%
Female	326	58.74%	114	53.27%	212	62.17%
Age (years)						
19	3	0.54%	2	0.93%	1	0.29%
18	55	9.91%	30	14.02%	25	7.33%
17	109	19.64%	40	18.69%	69	20.23%
16	148	26.67%	54	25.23%	94	27.57%
15	141	25.41%	55	25.70%	86	25.22%
14	92	16.58%	30	14.02%	62	18.18%
13	7	1.26%	3	1.4%	4	1.17%

There were more girls in the group of young people, which accounted for 58.74% of the total number of respondents, and more girls in the Catholic school (62.17%). The respondents included 41.26% boys, with more boys from the public school participating (46.73%). The age of the young people ranged from 13 to 19 years. The largest proportion of the respondents was 16 years old (26.67%), followed by 15 years old (25.41%) and 17 years old (19.64%). Taking into account the type of school, it can be seen that the largest group (27.57%) were 16 years old and attended the Catholic school, whilst the largest number of people in a public school were 15 years old (25.70%).

Declarations regarding the religious affiliation of the respondents were determined. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Religious affiliation in the study group, by type of school

Religious affiliation	Total		Type of school			
			Public		Catholic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Deep believer	94	16.94%	29	13.55%	65	19.06%
Believer	305	54.95%	86	40.19%	219	64.22%
Indifferent	93	16.76%	51	23.83%	42	12.32%
Non-believer	63	11.35%	48	22.43%	15	4.4%
Cochran condition			fulfilled			
Pearson's chi-square			64.2433			
Degrees of freedom			3			
p-value			<0.0001			
Fisher's exact test (p)			<0.0001			

The largest number of adolescents (54.95%) declared that they were believers; 16.94% described themselves as deep believers. In turn, 16.76% of the respondents described their religious affiliation as indifferent, and 11.35% declared themselves to be non-believers. Taking into account the type of school, it can be said that the largest number of young people in both the Catholic school (64.22%) and the public school (40.19%) declared that they are believers. Another 19.06% of the respondents in the Catholic school described themselves as deep believers. The same declaration was made by 13.55% of the young people in the public school. Indifferent religious affiliation was specified by 23.83% of the respondents from the public school, and in the Catholic school 12.32%. In turn, 22.43% of the respondents from the public school declared that they are non-believers, whilst in the Catholic school this answer was chosen by 4.4% of the young people.

In order to identify the differences in the distribution of the results regarding the religious affiliation of the adolescents with regard to the type

of school, the statistical χ^2 test of correlation and Fisher's exact test were applied. Cochran's condition was met; the statistical difference that occurred in the distribution of responses with three degrees of freedom was statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$); the value of χ^2 was 64.2433, also in Fisher's exact test ($p < 0.0001$). Based on the analysis of the results, it can be concluded that between the two groups there was a highly significant ($p < 0.01$) difference in the distribution of religious affiliation of the respondents. In the Catholic school, more respondents declared deep faith or belief than in the public school, whilst religious indifference or lack of faith were recorded more often in the public school than in the Catholic school, though such responses were observed. Also, the denomination of each young person was specified. The analysis of these results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Denomination in the study group, by type of school

Denomination	Total		Type of school			
			Public		Catholic	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Catholic	474	85.41%	151	70.56%	323	94.72%
Agnostic	5	0.9%	5	2.34%	0	0%
Atheist	29	5.23%	20	9.35%	9	2.64%
Other	21	3.78%	17	7.94%	4	1.17%
None	26	4.68%	21	9.81%	5	1.47%
Cochran's condition			Not fulfilled			
Pearson's chi-square			63.7569			
Degrees of freedom			4			
p-value			<0.0001			
Fisher's exact test (p)			<0.0001			

In the study group, most people (85.41%) declared that they were Catholic. In the religious school, this accounted for 94.72% of the respondents; in the public school it was 70.56%. The χ^2 statistical test of

correlation (chi-square) and Fisher’s exact test were used to determine the differences in the results concerning the denomination of the students. Cochran’s condition was not fulfilled. The statistical difference that occurred in the distribution of responses with four degrees of freedom was statistically significant ($p < 0.0001$); the χ^2 value was 63.7569, also in Fisher’s exact test ($p < 0.0001$). The analysis of the results shows that there was a statistically significant difference ($p < 0.01$) in the distribution of the respondents’ denomination.

Analysis of the results

The original questionnaire was used to analyse the spirituality and religiousness of the secondary school students. In the aspect of spirituality, the questions concerned feelings of bond with God, the meaning of life, relationships with people, and bond with nature and the cosmos. The data characterising the spirituality of adolescents from the two schools were compared and Student’s t-test was applied. Detailed data is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Spirituality in the study group, by type of school

Spirituality	Total	Type of school	
		Public	Catholic
Mean	6.8198	6.486	7.0293
Median	7	6.5	7
Standard deviation	2.4634	2.4336	2.4625
Minimum	0	0	1
Maximum	12	12	12
Lower quartile	5	5	5
Upper quartile	9	8	9
Student’s t-test (df=553)	t	2.5416	
	p	0.0113	

The analysis of the results shows that the arithmetic mean of spirituality scores in the public school group was 6.48 and the standard deviation was 2.433. In turn, in the Catholic school group, the arithmetic mean was 7.029 and the standard deviation was 2.462. The t-test revealed differences ($t(553)=2.54$, $p=0.0113$). Thus, it can be concluded that the spirituality scale scores differed significantly ($p<0.05$) between the two groups, being higher in the Catholic school.

In terms of religiousness, the questions on the survey concerned the frequency of participation in community religious practices (e.g. Sunday Mass), individual religious practices (e.g. individual prayer) and contact with religious communities/groups or organisations (e.g. liturgical altar service, the Light-Life Movement “Oasis” or the Neocatechumenal Way). The data was also compared and Student’s t-test was applied. The results are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Religiousness in the study group, by type of school

Religiousness	Total	Type of school	
		Public	Catholic
Mean	4.9784	3.771	5.7361
Median	5	3	6
Standard deviation	2.8264	3.0672	2.3728
Minimum	0	0	0
Maximum	9	9	9
Lower quartile	3	1	4
Upper quartile	7	6	8
Student’s t-test (df=553)	t	7.991	
	p	<0.0001	

The arithmetic mean of religiousness in the public school group was $M=3.77$ and the standard deviation was 3.06, while in the Catholic school

group the arithmetic mean was 5.73 and the standard deviation was 2.37. The t-test revealed differences ($t(553)=7.991$). Therefore, it can be concluded that the scores on the religiousness scale differed highly significantly ($p<0.01$) between the two groups, being higher in the Catholic school.

Correlations were sought between declared religious affiliation (non-believer, indifferent, believer or deep believer) and spirituality. For this purpose, one-way ANOVA, Tukey’s post hoc test and Fisher’s linear trend test were used. The results are summarised in Tables 6 and 7.

Table 6. Public school spirituality scale scores, by religious affiliation

	Religious affiliation			
	Non-believer	Indifferent	Believer	Deep believer
Mean	5.4375	6.1373	6.8605	7.7241
Standard error of the mean	0.3287	0.3384	0.2151	0.5786
Standard deviation	2.2776	2.4168	1.9951	3.1156
-95% CI for the group mean	4.7762	5.4575	6.4327	6.539
+95% CI for the group mean	6.0988	6.817	7.2882	8.9092
ANOVA	F=7.0544, p=0.0002			
Post hoc (Tukey HSD), Uniform groups	a	ab	bc	c
Linear trend (Fisher LSD)	F=19.9168, p<0.0001			

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean scores of the four subgroups for religious affiliation. The F-statistic was 7.0544 and the p-value was 0.0002. Therefore, it can be concluded that the scores on the spirituality scale differed very significantly ($p<0.01$) in the public school according to religious affiliation, and that these differences reveal a highly significant ($p<0.01$) trend: the higher the declaration of faith, the higher the spirituality score.

**Table 7. Spirituality scale score in the Catholic school,
 by religious affiliation**

	Religious affiliation			
	Non-believer	Indifferent	Believer	Deep believer
Mean	5.1333	5.8333	6.9087	8.6462
Standard error of the mean	0.5058	0.3988	0.1566	0.258
Standard deviation	1.9591	2.5843	2.3168	2.0799
-95% CI for the group mean	4.0484	5.028	6.6001	8.1308
+95% CI for the group mean	6.2182	6.6387	7.2172	9.1615
ANOVA	F=18.1739, p<0.0001			
Post hoc (Tukey HSD), Uniform groups	a	a	b	c
Linear trend (Fisher LSD)	F=14.3197, p=0.0001			

The F-statistic was 18.1739 and the p-value was <0.0001. The scores on the spirituality scale in the Catholic school differed very significantly ($p<0.01$) according to religious affiliation, and the differences show a highly significant ($p<0.01$) trend: the higher the declaration of faith, the higher the spirituality score.

Correlations were also sought between declared religious affiliation (non-believer, indifferent, believer and deep believer) and the religiousness of the respondents. For this purpose, one-way ANOVA, Tukey's post hoc test and Fisher's linear trend test were also used. Detailed results are summarised in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8. Scale of religiousness in the public school, by religious affiliation

	Religious affiliation			
	Non-believer	Indifferent	Believer	Deep believer
Mean	0.9167	2.3922	4.7791	7.931
Standard error of the mean	0.2284	0.3419	0.2405	0.3289
Standard deviation	1.5823	2.442	2.2303	1.7714
-95% CI for the group mean	0.4572	1.7053	4.3009	7.2572
+95% CI for the group mean	1.3761	3.079	5.2572	8.6048
ANOVA	F=81.3939, p<0.0001			
Post hoc (Tukey HSD), Uniform groups	a	b	c	d
Linear trend (Fisher LSD)	F=135.3715, p<0.0001			

The F-statistic was 81.3939 and the p-value was $p < 0.0001$. The scores on the religiousness scale differed highly significantly ($p < 0.01$) in the public school according to religious affiliation, and the differences show a highly significant ($p < 0.01$) trend: the higher the declaration of faith, the higher the religiousness score.

Table 9. Religiousness scale in the Catholic school, by religious affiliation

	Religious affiliation			
	Non-believer	Indifferent	Believer	Deep believer
Mean	1.6667	3.3095	5.9087	7.6615
Standard error of the mean	0.504	0.3151	0.1323	0.163
Standard deviation	1.9518	2.0421	1.9585	1.3143
-95% CI for the group mean	0.5858	2.6732	5.6478	7.3359
+95% CI for the group mean	2.7475	3.9459	6.1695	7.9872
ANOVA	F=71.2934, p<0.0001			
Post hoc (Tukey HSD), Uniform groups	a	b	c	d
Linear trend (Fisher LSD)	F=3.479, p=0.0315			

The F-statistic was 71.2934 and the p-value was $p < 0.0001$. Thus, the results on the religiousness scale differed very significantly ($p < 0.01$) in the Catholic school according to religious affiliation, and the differences show a highly significant ($p < 0.01$) trend: the higher the declaration of faith, the higher the religiousness score.

Research limitations

The results of the study should be considered in light of the following limitations. Firstly, the study involved only students from one city (Krakow), and from selected secondary schools. Therefore, the analysis has only a local dimension. Secondly, the results represent only the opinions and declarations of those students who agreed to participate in the survey, so the results cannot be generalised to the entire population of young people in Krakow or Poland. Thirdly, the issue in question is very personal, difficult, and sensitive. Despite these limitations, it is worth conducting further research on the religiousness and spirituality of young people in future. It also seems advisable to broaden the research, especially with regard to gender and age differences and different types of spirituality.

Summary of the research

A detailed analysis of the results obtained from the survey answered the research questions. Based on the study, the hypotheses regarding spirituality and religiousness in secondary school students were verified. Based on the analysis of the survey data, it was noted that the scores on the spirituality scale differed significantly ($p < 0.05$) between the groups, and that they were higher in the Catholic school. Similarly, scores on the religiousness scale differed very significantly ($p < 0.01$) between groups and were higher in the Catholic school. Regarding the correlation of spirituality and religious affiliation, it was found that in both schools the differences

showed a highly significant ($p < 0.01$) trend: the higher the declaration of faith among adolescents, the higher the spirituality score. Regarding the correlation of religiousness and religious affiliation, in the public school there was a highly significant ($p < 0.01$) trend, and in the Catholic school the differences also showed a significant ($p < 0.05$) trend: in both types of schools a higher declaration of faith meant a higher religiousness score.

The results of the survey among secondary school students from two types of schools (public and Catholic) in Krakow indicate that spirituality and religiousness are related to each other. Undoubtedly, attending a religious school can be a valuable contribution to developing the religious/spiritual sphere in a young person. However, such development is also possible in a public school. In this case, it may be connected more with a personal search and individual effort in this sphere. Certainly, the influence of the family, school and peer environments is a valuable contribution to an adolescent reaching full maturity.

There is no doubt that spirituality and religiousness are important components of human resources needed for development. It is thanks to them that it becomes possible to give life a fuller dimension, purposefulness, meaningfulness and stability. In light of the research, it is worth noting that the abandonment of Catholic schools or religious education or upbringing would be an irreparable loss from the point of view of the full development of a young person.

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