

Study finds people's spiritual awareness varies throughout the day

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People who report having spiritual awareness have it vary throughout the day, rather than being constant, according to a study by University of Connecticut researchers.

The study, which will be presented at the 110th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA), found that people had the highest levels of spiritual awareness in the morning and while engaged in activities such as praying, worship, and meditation. Spiritual awareness also was high when people listened to music, read, or exercised. It was low while people were doing work-related activities or playing video games.

Being at work reduced spiritual awareness, which the authors measured as self-reported awareness of God, a higher power, or larger ideal. Those who worked the most appeared to have the lowest awareness.

Additionally, the study found that the kind of people who watched the news had higher overall spiritual awareness than those who did not; however, the act of watching the news lowered awareness for everyone.

"What surprised us is how much people vary in awareness of God across the day and across activities," said Bradley R.E. Wright, an associate professor of sociology at the University of Connecticut and a co-author of the study. "There is a complex interplay between spiritual awareness and the situation. Sometimes the situation you are in affects your spiritual awareness. Other times your spiritual awareness affects the situation you're in."

This study analyzes data from the larger SoulPulse study (SoulPulse.org), which collects data using participants' smartphones. This experience sampling method allowed researchers to track spiritual awareness in real time during study participants' normal daily activities.

While the SoulPulse study is ongoing, a total of 2,439 people in the United States took two SoulPulse surveys each day for two weeks between November 2013 and May 2015. Wright and his collaborators used that data for their study.

Each daily survey included 15 to 25 randomly selected questions from a larger pool of 120 daily questions. Although the SoulPulse participants were socially and geographically diverse, the study group is not a nationally representative sample because it was limited to people who owned a smart phone and who self-selected into the study.

Wright's collaborators included Jaime Kucinkas, a sociologist at Hamilton College and the lead author of the study; graduate student D. Matthew Ray, of the University of Connecticut; and Pastor John C. Ortberg, of Menlo Park Presbyterian Church in Menlo Park, California.

The SoulPulse study is funded by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation, and Wright is the principle investigator.

More information: The paper, "States of Spiritual Awareness by Time, Activity, and Social Interaction," will be presented on Sunday, Aug. 23, at 8:30 a.m. CDT in Chicago at the American Sociological Association's 110th Annual Meeting.

Provided by American Sociological Association

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