

# Religiosity plays a role in educational success of immigrant children

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In a recently conducted study, Professor Sarah Carol (Institute of Sociology and Social Psychology, University of Cologne) and Benjamin Schulz (Berlin Social Science Center—WZB) have investigated the influence of different forms of religiosity on the educational success of Muslim and Christian children with an immigrant background. They found that the correlation between school achievement and religiosity depends on the form of religious engagement. Being engaged in mosques, for example, positively correlates with better school achievement if the children do not live in segregated neighbourhoods. The results of the study, titled "Religiosity as a bridge or barrier to immigrant children's educational achievement?" have now been published in the journal *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility*.

In the past, other studies have concluded that in Germany, children with an immigrant background have lower [achievement](#) than children without a migration background. Fewer than 25 percent of students of second-generation Turkish background finish their Abitur (secondary education degree allowing university entrance) in Germany. For children without a history of immigration, this rate is at over 40 percent. Previous research has tended to focus on the ethnic background, educational level and socioeconomic status of the parents.

Carol and Schulz instead focused on the significance of religiosity for [school achievement](#) and as a motor of educational mobility. "We wanted to find out whether or not religious organizations offer young people orientation and support and whether or not religiosity promotes greater

self-control," says Sarah Carol. Both aspects are positively correlated with [educational success](#).

The researchers used data collected by the German National Education Panel Study (NEPS) to test their hypotheses regarding Muslim and Christian children with a migration background. As indicators for [educational achievement](#), the study relied mostly on the results of math tests. The degree of religiosity and belonging to a religious community was gauged using a questionnaire. The parents' country of origin (Turkey, former Soviet Union, eastern Europe, southern Europe, western Europe, Asia, others) provided the necessary information regarding the children's migration background.

"The study shows that religiosity does not hinder educational [success](#) per se. In the case of Christian as well as Muslim pupils, under certain circumstances, religiosity does not stand in the way of good school performance," says Carol. "However, religiosity is more relevant for the educational success of Muslim children. For Christian children, religiosity hardly plays any role." As far as the correlation between engagement in an Islamic community and school performance is concerned, the authors had to consider an additional factor: If students live in non-segregated neighbourhoods, there is a positive correlation between religious involvement and math competence. If, however, they live in segregated neighbourhoods, these [children](#) no longer have this advantage. In that case, religious involvement can even be an obstacle to school success.

High frequency of prayer also goes hand in hand with better [school performance](#). "Regular praying indicates self-discipline and intrinsic motivation. Both are also key factors for success in school," says Carol. But this does not apply to Muslim pupils who regard themselves as highly religious, and to those who do not regularly practice their religion. This group of pupils is more likely to leave school early without

completing secondary education (earning only a Hauptschule degree) or to drop out. Carol believes this has something to do with this group's special situation: "Muslim religiosity can be an important aspect of the social identity of pupils who have problems at school or adapting to the world of work."

In sum, Carol and Schulz have found that subjective religiosity can be an obstacle to educational success, but other facets of Muslim [religiosity](#) do not necessarily hamper pupils' [school](#) achievements.

**More information:** Sarah Carol et al, Religiosity as a bridge or barrier to immigrant children's educational achievement?, *Research in Social Stratification and Mobility* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.rssm.2018.04.001](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.rssm.2018.04.001)

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