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INTERNAL ANXIETY AND PEACE OF HEART AMONG YOUTH

Exploring the role of religiosity and spirituality

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Introduction

The feeling of anxiety (which can be colloquially called internal anxiety or existential anxiety) is a growing phenomenon among the young generation in times of unrest and tension in Europe and around the world. At the same time, the modern “city without God” is transforming into a “city with many deities”. These two trends influence the lives of today’s youth. It is therefore worth asking the question: What is the relationship between the occurrence of anxiety symptoms in the independent perception of high school graduates and their declarations of religiosity and spirituality? According to Stanisław Gład, there is a visible lack of research on the connection between existential anxiety and religious feelings or involvement (Gład, 2008).

Basic concepts

Internal anxiety is commonly associated with the feeling of threat or danger. For the purposes of the research, it has been assumed that anxiety is understood as a personality trait, understood as the individual’s tendency to perceive situations as threatening or to predict future events in terms of danger, which is manifested through characteristic symptoms at the cognitive, emotional, behavioural and somatic level (Spielberger et al., 1983).

The concept of peace of heart (which can be an antidote to anxiety) is often associated with religion and spirituality in human life. You can find texts from the Bible, from the works of spiritual masters, from church documents or from those used by various religious communities, testifying to the

soothing effect of peace of heart on internal states of anxiety in human life. Here are some examples:

My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from him.

(Psalm 62, 1–2)

First keep thyself in peace, and then shalt thou be able to be a peacemaker towards others. [...] but to be able to live peaceably with the hard and perverse, or with the disorderly, or those who oppose us, this is a great grace and a thing much to be commended and most worthy of a man.

(Kempis, 1986, 2)

Hence peace is likewise the fruit of love, which goes beyond what justice can provide. That earthly peace which arises from love of neighbor symbolizes and results from the peace of Christ which radiates from God the Father.

(Gaudium et Spes, 78)

My Lord You will give me peace of heart, because You are my salvation. Thus in You my soul will find peace and be calm.

(Kanon z Taize)

In the postmodern world, religiosity and spirituality mix. Both forms do not have to oppose each other, on the contrary, and in fact they often interpenetrate each other. Church-oriented religion is still present in the lives of individuals and societies (especially in Poland). In turn, the non-religious *sacrum* appears and develops in areas where religion is not active.

Janusz Mariański states that:

While in the past religiosity and spirituality were defined as complementary to some extent, and religious and church institutions defined the limits of the manifestation of spirituality and its forms and shapes in which it could appear, now both realities are diverging, and the new spirituality no longer refers to any religious doctrines. To some extent, it is shaped inside a person, tailored to his or her individual needs.

(Mariański, 2021, 42)

Spirituality includes a very diverse content: self-acceptance, searching for the meaning of life, the ability to sacrifice yourself for people and values, intense experience of beauty, recognition of the sacredness of nature, connection with people, nature and the cosmos, meditation experience, psycho-changeable energy and connection with deity.

Religiosity is related to internal, mental processes connected with experiencing a specific relationship with the *sacrum*. We can infer religiosity based on elements such as religious awareness and feelings, religious decisions, bonds with the community, religious practices, morality, religious experiences and forms of religious life (Walesa, 2020). Religiosity, colloquially speaking, has two aspects: “supernatural”, which cannot be examined empirically, and “natural”, which can be the subject of observation and empirical scientific research.

When examining religiosity, Mariański lists the following aspects: denominational and religious affiliation, religious beliefs (a matter of dogma), religious practices (obligatory, such as participation in Sunday services or confession; optional, such as prayer or participation in religious classes) and issues of marital and family morality (Mariański, 2023).

The state of research

The results obtained in Jacek Śliwak’s research prove that there is a relationship between the level of general, overt and hidden anxiety and religious relationships to God. People whose unrest (general, overt and hidden) is higher are characterized primarily by a more negative relationship with God, manifested in rebellion, fear and guilt. In turn, these types of relationships are less visible in people with lower anxiety (Śliwak, 2006). Research conducted among young people by Józef Bazylak (1982) indicates that an extensive religious life makes a person’s personality more mature and thus has a greater sense of security.

Methodological assumptions

The main research problem has been expressed in the question: Is there a correlation between the occurrence of anxiety symptoms in the independent perception of high school students and their declarations of religiosity and spirituality?

The following detailed research problems have also been formulated: Are there noticeable differences in the scale of anxiety among youth from public and Catholic schools? Are there any noticeable differences in the scale of religiosity among young people from public and Catholic schools? Are there any noticeable differences in the scale of spirituality among young people from public and Catholic schools?

In my own empirical research, a diagnostic survey method with survey technique has been used. A standardized tool for examining the intensity of anxiety as a personality trait, SL-C has been used (Piksa, Kosiorowska, & Golonka, 2020) together with an original survey on the religiosity and spirituality of young people based on the publications of Janusz Marianski and Halina Mielicka.

The SL-C scale is an attempt to balance various aspects of anxiety, taking into account emotions, beliefs and reactions. The authors' goal was to develop a simple, easy-to-use tool for measuring unrest that can be used in online research. The SL-C consists of 15 items, each of which is an extension of the question "Please rate how often do you feel the following condition...". Answers are given on a 4-point scale from *Often* to *Never*. Each answer is scored accordingly: *often* – 3, *sometimes* – 2, *rarely* – 1 and *never* – 0, except for items 9 and 11, in which the scoring method should be reversed: *often* – 0, *sometimes* – 1, *rarely* – 2 and *never* – 3. The SL-C score is the sum of all points, the possible scores range from 0 (minimum intensity of the anxiety trait) to 45 (maximum intensity of the anxiety trait).

The author's questionnaire for research on religiosity and spirituality is based on religiosity research conducted by the state center CBOS (Public Opinion Research Center) and Janusz Marianski (Mariański, 2023) and also on spirituality research conducted by Halina Mielicka-Pawłowska and Sławomir Chrost (Chrost 2013). For the purposes of our own research, a 4-step measurement of selected three aspects of religiosity (participation in community and individual religious practices and contacts with religious communities/groups or organizations) and four selected aspects of spirituality (bond with God, meaning of life, bond with people and bond with nature and space) have been adopted. Answers are given on a 4-point scale from *Often* to *Never*. Each answer is 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. To conduct research in selected Cracow high schools, consent from the relevant authorities was obtained. The survey questionnaire was prepared online, posted and made available on the Google platform. The request to complete the survey questionnaire was preceded by a letter presenting the purpose and scope of the research and a link to this tool. Participation in the research was anonymous and voluntary, and participants could resign from completing and sending responses at any time.

After verification and selection of the received data, a total of 555 correctly completed survey questionnaires were qualified for quantitative statistical analysis. Statistical analysis was performed using the PQStat statistical package version 1.8.4.152. Another statistical analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical methods and appropriately selected tests. Quantitative variables (e.g., anxiety, spirituality and religiosity) were compared between the two groups using Student's t-test. The relationships between anxiety, spirituality and religiosity were analyzed by estimating Pearson's coefficients of linear correlation. A test probability at $p < 0.05$ was considered significant, and a test probability at $p < 0.01$ was considered highly significant.

It was assumed that there are significant differences between the feeling of anxiety as well as in the scales of religiosity and spirituality among young people from public and Catholic schools (in favour of the Catholic school), as well as a significant relationship between religiosity, spirituality and anxiety.

Characteristics of the study group

People were purposefully selected for the study, so the request to complete the survey questionnaire was addressed to young people studying at selected Catholic high schools and a public high school in Cracow. A total of 555 high school students participated in the research, including 341 (61.44%) students of a Catholic high school and 214 (38.56%) students of a public high school (Table 15.1).

There were more women in the studied youth group, constituting 58.74% of the total number of respondents, and there were more women in the Catholic school – 62.17% of the total number of respondents. However, a

TABLE 15.1 Basic characteristics of the respondents

<i>Variables</i>	<i>In general</i>		<i>School type</i>			
			<i>Public</i>		<i>Catholic</i>	
	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Gender						
Man	229	41,26%	100	46,73%	129	37,83%
Woman	326	58,74%	114	53,27%	212	62,17%
Age						
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	25,7%	86	25,22%
14	92	16,58%	30	14,02%	62	18,18%
13	7	1,26%	3	1,4%	4	1,17%
Religious affiliation						
Deeply religious	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%
Belief						
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%
Not given	26	4,68%	21	9,81%	5	1,47%

Source: own research.

total of 41.26% of men participated in the research, and there were more of them in public schools – 46.73%. The youth ranged in age from 13 to 19. Most respondents were 16 years old – 26.67%, followed by 15 years old – 25.41%, and 17 years old – 19.64%. Taking into account religious affiliation, the majority of respondents declared that they were believers, constituting 54.95% of all respondents; in a Catholic high school it was 64.22% and in a public school 40.19%. In turn, the largest number of people declared they were Catholic – 85.41% of all respondents; in a Catholic school, this religion was declared by 94.72%, and in a public school, 70.56%.

Analysis of the obtained results

In order to investigate the internal anxiety of the surveyed youth, it was assumed that it manifests itself in the feeling of fear. The research used an anxiety scale, and the obtained results were subjected to statistical analysis using the Student's t-test. Detailed data is presented in Figure 15.1.

The analysis of the obtained data shows that the t-test did not reveal any differences ($t(553) = 0.9949$; $p = 0.8632$); it can therefore be concluded that the anxiety scale [SL-C] does not differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) between groups of youth from public and Catholic schools. In order to examine the religiosity of young people, an original survey was used. The results are presented in Figure 15.2.

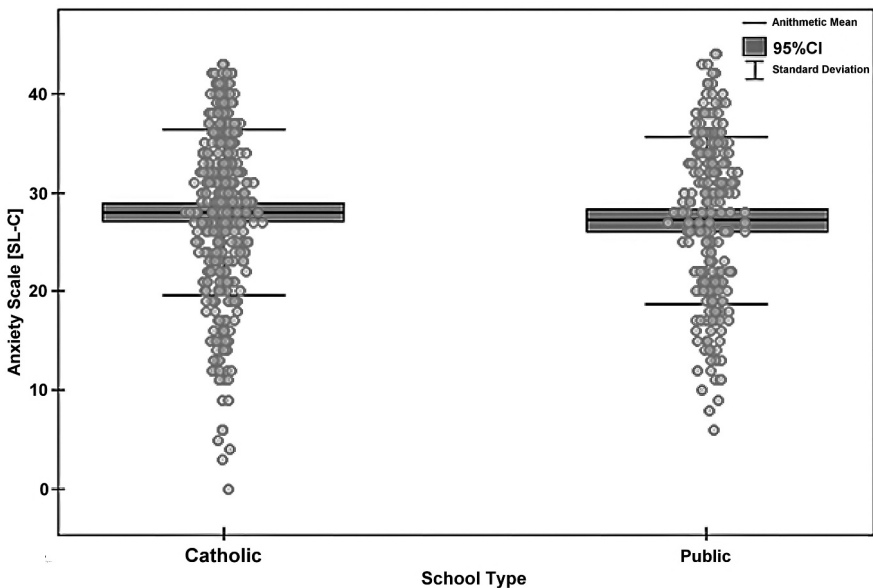


FIGURE 15.1 Anxiety scale [SL-C] in the surveyed group in general and by school type. Graph by the authors.

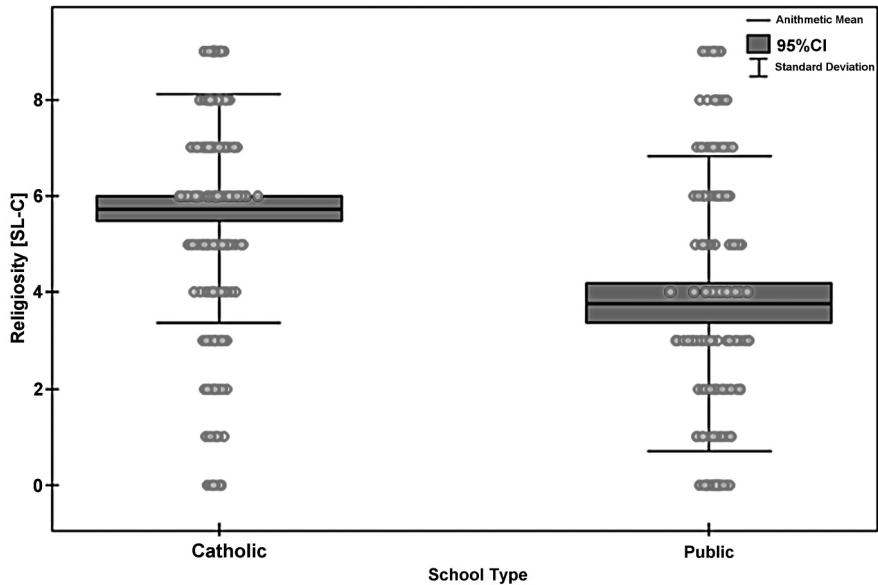


FIGURE 15.2 Religiosity in the surveyed group in general and by school type. Graph by the authors.

The analysis of the data shows that the arithmetic mean of the results in the group of public school students was $M = 3.77$, and the standard deviation was $SD = 3.06$. However, in the group of Catholic school students, the arithmetic mean was $M = 5.73$ and the standard deviation was $SD = 2.37$. The t-test revealed differences $t(553) = 7.991$. It can therefore be concluded that the scale of religiosity differs highly significantly ($p < 0.01$) between groups and is higher in Catholic schools.

Youth spirituality was also examined using an original survey. Figure 15.3 shows the results.

The analysis of the obtained results shows that the arithmetic mean of the results in the group of public school students was $M = 6.48$, and the standard deviation was $SD = 2.433$. In turn, in the group of Catholic school students, the arithmetic mean was $M = 7.029$ and the standard deviation was $SD = 2.462$. The t-test revealed differences $t(553) = 2.54$ and $p = 0.0113$. Therefore, it can be concluded that the results on the spirituality scale differ significantly ($p < 0.05$) between groups and are higher in Catholic schools.

To find out the relationship between anxiety, religiosity and spirituality, the obtained results were analyzed by estimating Pearson's coefficients of linear correlation for individual scales. These calculations also took into account the division of the group into public and Catholic school students. Detailed data are presented in Table 15.2.

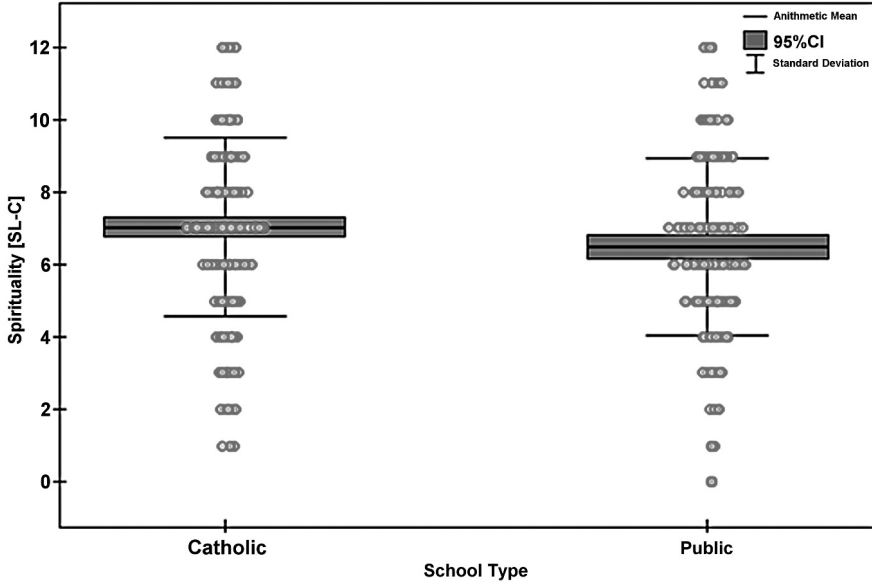


FIGURE 15.3 Spirituality in the surveyed group in general and by school type. Graph by the authors.

TABLE 15.2 Correlations of anxiety with spirituality and religiosity in the surveyed youth

	<i>School type</i>			
	<i>Public</i>		<i>Catholic</i>	
	<i>Religiosity</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>	<i>Religiosity</i>	<i>Spirituality</i>
r Pearsona	-0,0518	-0,152	-0,0287	-0,173
Error for r	0,0686	0,0679	0,0543	0,0535
-95% CI	-0,1846	-0,2804	-0,1345	-0,2741
+95% CI	0,0829	-0,0182	0,0778	-0,068
Statistic t for r	-0,7547	-2,2388	-0,5285	-3,2333
df	212	212	339	339
p	0,4513	0,0262	0,5975	0,0013

Source: own research.

The analysis of the presented data shows that in the case of religiosity, there was no significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship with anxiety. However, in both types of schools, a significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between spirituality and anxiety was found.

Research limitations

The research results should be considered in light of the following limitations. First, the study involved only people studying in one city in Cracow and in selected general secondary schools, therefore the study has only a local dimension. Second, the results only represent the opinions and declarations of those students who agreed to participate in the study; therefore, the results cannot be generalized to the entire population of young people, both in Cracow and in Poland. Third, the examined issue concerns very personal, internal, difficult and sensitive issues. Despite these limitations, it is worth conducting further research in the future in order to more thoroughly and precisely understand the feeling of anxiety among young people and its determinants. It also seems advisable to deepen research, especially in relation to gender differences and references to the relationship with a personally understood God (e.g., in the dimension of the sacrament of reconciliation).

Summary and pedagogical implications

A detailed analysis of the research results provided answers to the formulated research problems. No differences were found in the anxiety scale among adolescents from public and Catholic schools. However, differences were noticed in the religiosity scale, as it differs highly significantly ($p < 0.01$) between the groups and is higher in the Catholic school. Significant differences were also found in the spirituality scale ($p < 0.05$) between the groups, and they are higher in the Catholic school.

When looking for a correlation between the occurrence of anxiety symptoms in the independent perception of high school students and their declarations of religiosity and spirituality, it is worth noting that in both types of schools, there was no significant ($p > 0.05$) relationship between religiosity and anxiety. However, in both types of schools, a significant ($p < 0.05$) relationship between spirituality and anxiety was found.

It was noted that the adopted hypothesis was partially confirmed. First, a significant relationship between spirituality and anxiety was demonstrated. Spirituality may have a beneficial effect on the feeling of anxiety among young people, while a declaration of faith has a positive effect on the development of spirituality. The research also showed that the scale of spirituality differed highly significantly ($p < 0.01$) depending on religious affiliation in public and Catholic schools, and the differences are a highly significant trend ($p < 0.01$), i.e., the higher the declaration of faith, the higher the spirituality score.

Internal anxiety in a person's life causes lower physical and emotional resilience and may influence experiencing difficulties in making intellectual decisions. In turn, inner peace is a challenge and a task for every person, so you must first shape it within yourself. It is worth emphasizing that both in

terms of anxiety and development, religiosity and spirituality give a person hope for survival and enable the achievement of many goals. Undoubtedly, religiosity and spirituality are important components of the human resources needed for the development of young people (Chrost, 2017). Thanks to them, it becomes possible to give life a fuller dimension, purposefulness, meaning and stability. Religiosity and spirituality are related to motivational factors that play an important role in feeling satisfaction in life, happiness and experiencing positive emotional states. Additionally, they may also be linked to mental health and overall well-being. Religiosity and spirituality are important and necessary conditions for proper upbringing because, without their development, a person is unable to manage his or her life in a conscious and responsible way. Spirituality is not exclusively innate but thrives as a result of actions taken by a developing person. Achieving spiritual maturity is an important element of personal growth, which is why a person should make efforts to flourish it. Therefore, as a conclusion from the research, from a pedagogical point of view, the statement about the need to develop the religious and spiritual sphere of a young person (“education for peace of heart”) seems justified.

Thanks to “peace of heart”, understood as a high level of religious and spiritual life, a person can develop integrally towards the fullness of life, without feeling threats and dangers that “paralyze” the process of making choices.

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