

Spirituality plays significant part in children's happiness

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By Ron Csillag

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TORONTO (RNS)—Spirituality contributes significantly to a child's overall happiness—even more so than for adults, according to a new study from the University of British Columbia.

The study tested 315 children ages 9 to 12, measuring spirituality and other factors such as temperament and social relations that can affect an individual's sense of happiness.

Erin Oquindo sorts donations at a Nashville-area drop point for Shoes for Orphan Souls, a ministry of Buckner International, for which the Vacation Bible School at her church in Franklin, Tenn., raised 261 pairs of shoes and 605 pairs of socks.

When Erin turned 10 and invited friends to her birthday party, she told them she didn't want gifts for herself, but asked them to bring shoes and socks to donate to Shoes for Orphan Souls. A recent study shows spirituality in children such as Erin contributes to their overall happiness. (BP photo/Robin Oquindo)

“Our goal was to see whether there’s a relation between spirituality and happiness,” said Mark Holder, associate professor of psychology and the study’s co-author. “We knew going in that there was such a relation in adults, so we took multiple measures of spirituality and happiness in children.”

Past studies have shown that in adults, spiritual feelings and higher levels of religious behavior typically account for about 5 percent of a person’s overall happiness, said a university statement.

The results of the study came as a surprise to researchers: 6.5 to 16.5 percent of children’s happiness can be accounted for by spirituality.

“From our perspective, it’s a whopping big effect,” said Holder. “I expected it to be much less. I thought their spirituality would be too immature to account for their well-being.”

Children in the study were asked to rate statements such as: “I feel a Higher Power’s presence.” They also answered questions including, “How often do you pray or meditate privately outside of church or other places of worship?”

Parents also were asked to describe each child’s apparent happiness and spirituality, and teachers rated each child’s happiness level.

The study’s authors plan to conduct the same research in India to see whether children score similar results in a country not dominated by Christianity.

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