

RELIGIOUS ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES, AND PRACTICES OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH MEMBERS IN AFRICA: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

A church member survey commissioned by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventist was done in Africa. This paper focuses on two-way comparison of the religious behaviors, attitudes, and experiences of male and female adults and youths for the purpose of addressing the issues affecting the religious life of church members.

SUMMARY OF THE PRESENTATION

Until the second half of the 20th century, an argument favors the idea that “religion and spirituality weaken innate tendencies toward material and social self-interest” (Ciarrocchi, Piedmont, & Williams, 2003, p. 62). Questions on whether religion plays an important role in human survival have not been addressed due to the absence of research on religious/spiritual aspects of pro-social behavior (Ciarrocchi et al., 2003). At the dawn of the 21st century, there had been an increased interest in religious/spiritual behavior, which led individuals/organizations to explore the relationship between religion and psychosocial variables through research (Plante & Sherman, cited in Ciarrocchi et al., 2003).

The Pew Research Center, established in 2004, explores the newest frontiers of research dealing with political, social, technological, scientific, and religious issues (Pew Research Center, 2018). Their recent researches on religion focused on religious beliefs and practices of Asian-Americans (Funt, 2012), on spirituality, beliefs, and practices of Americans in general (Alper, 2015; Smith, 2015; Lipka & Gecewicz, 2017) and of American Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) in particular (Lipka, 2015), and on religion in everyday life of Americans (Smith, Sciupac, & Mohamed, 2016), among others.

Researchers and church leaders in many parts of the world have become more and more interested in religious issues. Francis (2013) studied religious experience in China. In 2011-2012, a team of researchers surveyed the spiritual life patterns, beliefs, and attitudes of SDA church members in the African continent (Role, 2013). This present survey aims to help the church leadership understand what members feel, believe and practice.

The findings presented in this paper are from 14,419 respondents: 7,060 from East-Central Africa Division, 5,480 from Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division, and 1,879 from West-Central Africa Division. There were 8,640 males and 5,356 females who participated in the survey with ages ranging from 12 years to 85 years old.

Both youth and adults attend church services, particularly Sabbath School (almost every week) and attend prayer meeting and small group organized by the church (once a month). The youth spend more time in forming new friendships with non-Adventists in their community while the adults are more engaged in helping with the church ministry every Sabbath. Churches should have programs that give guidance to the youth on forming friendships with those who are not of the faith.

Church members spend time thinking about Jesus' life, have personal prayer, read the Bible, engage in personal devotions, and study the Sabbath School lesson more than once a week. Adults have greater participation in the Revival and Reformation and Total Member Involvement programs of the church than the youth.

Members see the importance of their local church being part of a worldwide church, take pride on the role and reputation of their church in the community, and apply the Bible teachings to their daily life. However, the adults apply lessons learned from Sabbath School more than the youth. Thirty-five percent of youth and adults across gender experienced church-related hurts and around 10% across groups have been sexually abused by an authority figure in church.

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