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YOUTH AND RELIGION: EXPLORING THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND RELIGIOUS COMMITMENT AND IDENTITY FORMATION

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Abstract. The study explores the motivations that drive modern youth toward religious commitment, both in belief and practice. In the context of rapid social change, globalization, digitalization, and the transformation of cultural values, religion continues to play a significant role in shaping the identity of young people and their sense of meaning. The research employed scientific methods of content analysis and data analysis. Content analysis was used to examine religious discourse, online materials, and interviews, while data analysis was applied to process survey results and identify consistent patterns. The finding revealed key motivating factors, including the search for meaning, the influence of family, and belonging. The study highlights both individual and sociocultural drivers of youth identity formation. The results are useful for educators, religious leaders, sociologists, and young people. These findings emphasize both personal and sociocultural dimensions of religious engagement among youth. The study contributes to a deeper academic understanding of the role of religion in the life trajectory of younger generations and social integration.

Key words: youth; religion; faith, religious commitment; motivations; religious commitment; religious identity; social influence; belief systems; cultural background

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ЖАСТАР ЖӘНЕ ДІН: ДІНИ ҰСТАНЫМ МЕН ДІНИ БІРЕГЕЙЛІКТІҢ ҚАЛЫПТАСУ СЕБЕПТЕРІН ЗЕРТТЕУ

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МОЛОДЁЖЬ И РЕЛИГИЯ: ИССЛЕДОВАНИЕ МОТИВАЦИИ РЕЛИГИОЗНОЙ ПРИВЕРЖЕННОСТИ И ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

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Аңдатпа. Бұл зерттеуде қазіргі жастардың дінге жақындығы, соның ішінде сенім мен құлшылылыққа жақындауына әсер ететін себептерді қарастырады. Қарқынды әлеуметтік өзгерістер, жаһандану, цифрландыру, мәдени құндылықтарды өзгертуі барысында дін жастардың мағыналық өзіндік ерекшелігі мен сезімін қалыптастыруда маңызды рөл атқаруда. Зерттеу барысында мазмұнды талдау және арнайы деректерді талдаудың ғылыми әдістері қолданылды. Мазмұнды талдау діни пікірталасты, онлайн материалдарды және сұхбат нәтижелерін зерттеу үшін пайдаланады, ал деректерді талдау сауалнама нәтижелерін өңдеу және дәйекті үлгілерді анықтау үшін қолданылды. Бұл жаңалық негізгі ынталандырушы факторларды, соның ішінде мән-мағынаны іздеуді, отбасы мен белгілі бір топқа тиесілі болудың әсерін анықтады. Зерттеу жастардың жеке басын қалыптастырудың жеке және әлеуметтік-мәдени әсер етуші күштерді көрсетеді. Нәтижелері педагогтарға, діни көшбасшыларға, әлеуметтанушыларға және жастарға пайдасы зор болады. Бұл тұжырымдар жастардың діни белсенділігінің жеке және әлеуметтік-мәдени аспектілерін көрсетеді. Зерттеу жас ұрпақтың өмір сүру шеңберіндегі діннің рөлін тереңірек ғылыми тұрғыдан түсінуге ықпал етеді, әрі құнды түсініктер ұсынады.

Түйін сөздер: жастар; дін; сенім; діни міндеттеме; ынталандыру; діни бірегейлік; әлеуметтік әсер; сенім жүйелері; мәдени мұра

Аннотация. В исследовании рассматриваются мотивы, побуждающие современную молодежь к религиозной приверженности как в вероисповеданию, так и в практике. В условиях стремительных социальных изменений, глобализации, цифровизации и трансформации культурных ценностей религия продолжает играть значительную роль в формировании идентичности молодых людей и понимание ими своего предназначения. В исследовании использовались научные методы контент-анализ и анализ данных. Контент-анализ использовался для изучения религиозного дискурса, онлайн-материалов и интервью, а анализ данных – для обработки результатов опроса и выявления закономерностей. В результате были выявлены основные мотивирующие факторы, в том числе поиск смысла, влияние семьи и принадлежности. Исследование подчеркивает как индивидуальные, так и социокультурные факторы формирования идентичности молодежи. Результаты исследования полезны педагогам, религиозным лидерам, социологам и молодым людям. Результат исследования подчеркивают как личностные, так как социокультурные аспекты религиозной активности молодежи. Исследование вносит вклад в углубление академического понимания роли религии в жизненной траектории молодых поколений и предлагает ценные идеи для социальной интеграции.

Ключевые слова: молодёжь; религия; вера; религиозная приверженность; стремление; религиозная идентичность; социальное влияние; система верований; культурное наследие

Introduction

In recent decades, the relationship between youth and religion has undergone profound transformations. As societies experience rapid globalization, digitalization, and cultural pluralism, religious engagement among young people adapts and evolves. Individuals seek social in spiritual traditions for a sense of belonging, moral direction, and community, while others gravitate towards secularism, indicating a larger cultural shift. Research shows that young people are increasingly caught between global individualism and a revival of traditional religious beliefs, demonstrating a complex and blended identity development shaped by both these forces. As a result, religious engagement among people assumes diverse forms.

Concepts are widely recognized, such as multidimensional constructs that encompass motivational, cognitive, and emotional elements. Religiosity, for instance, is primarily understood as an institutional, structured, external, and introspective aspect of religious experience (Hill, 2003). Religious beliefs are examined across three distinct dimensions: belief in the divine, belief in religion as a whole, and belief in mystical forces within life and natural phenomena. Belief in the divine pertains to the most literal interpretation of religious faith, involving the affirmation of the existence of specific religious entities such as God. In contrast, belief in religion as a general concept represents a moderately literal perspective, encompassing an acceptance of religious systems and their associated principles (Nishiwaki, 2004). Conversely, beliefs in mystical forces within life and natural phenomena often reflect symbolic religious perspectives. These beliefs assign deeper meaning to aspects of life and nature, such as mountains or animals, by linking them to religious significance and identity formation (Earhart, 2014).

This study utilizes the three-factor identity model (Crocetti, 2008) due to its simplicity and emphasis on the care domains closely tied to the current experience of youth, specifically education and friendship (Crocetti, 2017). By applying this model, the research aims to explore their present circumstance. The model posits that individuals approach adolescence with initial commitments derived from childhood identifications within key ideological and interpersonal areas, such as education and friendship (Meeus, 2010). It is considered essential for the moral development of a person and the formation of their worldview to effectively utilize the spiritual values of both global and traditional religious (Baytenova, 2017).

The social identity perspective suggests that individuals are driven to identify with their group in order to differentiate it from others, which helps maintain positive self-esteem or achieve self-enhancement (Tajfel, 1979). Expanding upon this concept, it was proposed that identification is most effectively attained by striking a suitable balance between the drive for personal distinctiveness and the need for group affiliation (Baumeister, 1995). Some group memberships are especially central to the self-concept and might be particularly salient under distressing circumstances. In this regard, religious identity may be especially important when a sense of individual safety and security has been undermined (Freeman, 2003). The belief system inherent in any religion often plays a crucial role in understanding why numerous individuals feel a strong connection to their religious community. Typically, people possess beliefs regarding themselves and their surroundings (Deaux, 1996). Belief systems frequently serve as social identities, shaping how individuals perceive themselves by emphasizing the significance

of group membership, such as gender or political affiliations, in their self-concept. Religion, however, stands apart from these constructs by incorporating not only social dimensions, but also epistemological beliefs about what is knowable or unknowable, and ontological beliefs about what can or cannot exist (Nelson, 2006).

The influence of digital media extends deeply into the realm of youth religious expression. Platforms such as social media and mobile applications are fostering the creation of «techno-religious spaces» (Mohamad, 2023), enabling teenagers and young adults to not only engage with religious content but also actively mold and display their beliefs in a digital environment. Despite declining institutional trust and increased individualism, many young people continue to express a need for meaning, structured moral frameworks, and belonging. Quantitative surveys link youth religiosity to positive psychological outcomes such as emotional stability and social behavior (Goodman, 2023), while quantitative studies reveal that family traditions, digital influencers, and peer communities significantly shape religious commitment. These online interactions often replace traditional religious authorities with peer-based influence and micro-celebrities, shifting the nature of religious learning and engagement.

This article investigated what motivates youth toward religious conviction activity. Using content analysis of interviews and online religious discourse, alongside quantitative data analysis of survey results, this study aims to uncover the personal and sociocultural factors that drive religious commitment among youth. By synthesizing discourse themes and statistical trends, it contributes a nuanced understanding of how younger generations are actively constructing their religious identities in a globalized and digital world.

Materials and Methods

The study utilized a qualitative research design with a strong emphasis on content analysis, complemented by basic data analysis techniques. The goal was to explore the underlying motivations behind religious commitment among youth by examining textual and narrative data obtained from participants. The primary data sources considered of publicly available research materials and datasets from previously published studies on youth and religion. All sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and accessibility for secondary analysis.

The research employed a qualitative research design, using an in-depth semi-structured questionnaire as the primary method of data collection. The qualitative approach was chosen to explore the complex, subjective experiences of young individuals regarding their religious commitment and identity formation. This method allowed for the collection of rich, nuanced data that captured personal motivations, reflections, and contextual influences.

In this study, the focus is on the youth of Kazakhstan, such as key participants in the formation and expression of religious identity. In the context of this study, youth are defined such to the policy of Kazakhstan on youth. According to the Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan «On State Youth Policy» (Article 1, Clause 2), youth are considered to be citizens between the ages of 14 and 35. However, in sociological and applied research, the age of 18 is often taken as the starting point, as it marks the beginning of legal adulthood and civic responsibility (Law of the Republic of Kazakhstan, 2015). This study involved 31 participants, selected through

a voluntary response sampling method. The data were collected via an online questionnaire created using Google Forms, and the survey link was distributed through university student group chats. All participants completed the questionnaire voluntarily, without any external pressure or incentives.

The sample size of 31 is a result of the open-access nature of the survey and the time frame allocated for data collection. This approach aligns with convenience sampling, commonly used in exploratory research or in studies with limited resources. Although the sample is relatively small, it provides initial insights into the religious identity patterns among youth of Kazakhstan and serves as a foundation for further, more extensive research.

Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure in range of religious backgrounds, age (ranging from 18 to 35), and level of engagement with religious practices. A total of 31 participants were questionnaire tested. Each questionnaire lasted approximately 15 minutes and was conducted on secure online platforms such as Google Forms. One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to assess statistically significant differences in responses among this group. This methodological approach provided empirical insight into the variations in religious motivations and identity construction among youth, contributing to a better understanding of the social and psychological dimensions of religiosity.

Understanding youth religious commitment requires a multifaceted approach, accounting for personality, identity, behavior, and sociocultural context. The following analysis synthesizes key empirical and qualitative insights to illuminate how young people develop and express religious commitment in various settings and across different challenges.

The qualitative content analysis was conducted on the textual data to identify recurring themes and patterns related to youth religious commitment. The inductive coding approach was used to allow themes to emerge organically from the material. Key categories included spiritual search, family influence, peer and community impact, identity development, and emotional or existential motivations.

Furthermore, primary data collection tools, the study also draws on secondary materials such as scholarly articles, reports, and statistical data from reputable sources. These provide a theoretical and contextual framework for understanding youth religiosity in different cultural and social settings. All materials include questionnaires and interview guides, which were originally in English, Kazakh, and Russian. For participants who were non-native Kazakh or Russian speakers, the materials were professionally translated into the relevant English.

Literature review

Understanding the motivations behind religious commitment in youth requires a multidisciplinary approach. The relationship between youth religion has been extensively studied across various disciplines, including psychology, sociology, and religious studies. The common focus in the literature is the role of religiosity and spirituality in shaping identity, coping strategies, social behavior, and psychological well-being among young people. The literature review examines previous studies that have explored religious commitment, motivations for faith, and the psychosocial outcomes associated with religiosity, and the literature review

synthesizes empirical findings and theoretical frameworks that help explain why young individuals adopt, maintain, or abandon religious beliefs and practices.

Erik Erikson (1968) identified adolescence as a critical stage in the development of identity, marked by the psychosocial conflict of Identity vs. Role Confusion. During this period, young individuals actively explore questions of self-definition, belonging, and values. In this context, religious identity can serve as a stabilizing force, contributing to a sense of internal coherence and social integration.

Measuring religious faith: tools and psychometrics. The recurring theme in the literature is the challenge of accurately measuring the intensity and authenticity of religious faith. The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSRFQ) has been one of the most widely adopted instruments in this area. Freiheiot et al. (2006) conducted a psychometric evaluation of this questionnaire and found it to be a valid and reliable tool for assessing the strength of religious faith across diverse populations. Later studies by Cummings et al. (2015) and Wnuk (2017) extended this research by testing the instrument on older adults and international student populations in Poland and Chile, respectively. Their findings confirmed the adaptability of SCSRFQ across age groups and cultural contexts, making it a valuable tool for studying religiosity among youth globally.

These tools allow researchers to move beyond binary classifications (religious vs. non-religious) and explore the depth and personal significance of faith in young lives of young people. Quantitative measurement also enables comparisons between groups, making it possible to detect trends related to gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, and cultural identity.

Religion such as a coping mechanism. Religion is also frequently linked to coping strategies in the face of psychological distress, life transitions, and social marginalization. Stanley et al. (2011) added to this body of work by examining preferences for incorporating spirituality into clinical treatment for anxiety and depression among older play a significant role in shaping mental health outcomes of individuals – a concussion with important implications for youth counseling and psychological support services. Allen and Lo (2010) further demonstrated the protective role of spirituality and religiosity in preventing substance abuse, showing that young people with strong religious backgrounds were less likely to engage in high-risk behaviors. Their study reinforces the idea that faith can provide a moral framework, a sense of accountability, and a community of support – all of which are protective factors during adolescence.

Development and Psychological Perspectives. Adolescence and early adulthood are critical periods for identity formation, and religion can provide structure, purpose, and a sense of belonging during these formative years. According to King and Boyatzis (2004), spiritual development during adolescence is closely tied to personal growth, value orientation, and moral reasoning. Their research emphasized that spirituality is not merely about ritual practice, but rather about existential exploration and the search for meaning – processes that are particularly intense during youth.

In addition, research on identity formation and its interaction with personality traits in emerging adults has received increasing attention in recent decades. Luyckx, Soenes, and Goossens (2006) explored how personality factors shape identity development in emerging adult women, revealing a dynamic interplay between identity statuses and individual personality

dimensions. Expanding the less globally, Schwartz et al. (2012) provided a comprehensive cross-cultural overview of identity development, emphasizing the variability of identity processes across sociocultural contexts. Meanwhile, religiosity has emerged as a significant factor influencing youth behavior and decision-making. Green et al. (2020) found that both religiosity and religious denomination were prospectively associated with youth contraceptive use, indicating that religious affiliation can play a critical role in shaping health behaviors. Barrow et al. (2021) conducted a qualitative study in Burkina Faso that highlighted how beliefs and perceptions of religious leaders about contraception deeply influence community attitudes and access to modern contraceptive methods. Together, these studies underscore the importance of considering both psychological and cultural-religious variables in understanding youth identity development and behavioral outcomes. Religious identity in Kazakhstan shapes moral values, social cohesion, and self-perception. Bolyshbaeva (2013) presents faith as a moral guide and source of hope. Kabidenova (2016) highlights its role in sustaining peace within a multi-ethnic society. Kenesbayev (2022) links youth religious identity to gender roles and group affiliation. Baytenova (2017), Aimaganbetova (2024), and Burova (2020) emphasize the role of religious education in fostering tolerance and value-based thinking. These works underline the significance of religious identity for both individual and societal development.

Main part

Psychological dispositions and identity formation

The development of religiosity and the formation of religious identity are intricately interwoven, a complex process unfolding across multiple dimensions and thought a lifespan of person. This is not a static process; rather, it is a dynamic interplay of cognitive, emotional, social, and behavioral factors that shape understanding of the individual and experience of faith. The truly comprehensive understanding of religious identity recognizes its multifaceted nature, encompassing not only beliefs and practices, but also a sense of the individual in relation to their faith community and the broader world.

The social identity perspective proves effective in clarifying why religiosity is often deeply valued, yet other theoretical approaches may also enhance our understanding of this phenomenon. As mentioned previously, religiosity might stem from an inherent need to find purpose and meaning in life (Park, 2007).

The sense of individual self is significantly sharpened by their social identity. This refers to the aspects of self-concept that stem from belonging to specific social groups. People strive to achieve equilibrium between their social identity, which defines them in relation to these groups and differentiates them from out-groups, and their personal identity. Personal identity encompasses unique characteristics that distinguish an individual from other members within their social group. Notably, aspects of social identity reflecting attitudes an individual or orientations towards a particular domain can be integrated into their overall sense of self (Schwartz, 2008).

This authentic development often involves a journey of self-discovery, where individuals wrestle with existential questions, explore diverse theological perspectives, and ultimately integrate their faith into their overall worldview. Early childhood experiences, particularly within

the family and immediate social context, significantly influence the initial formation of religious beliefs and practices. Parental involvement, the style of religious education, and the overall atmosphere of religious practice contribute to the development of people's understanding of faith. However, this initial framework is not deterministic; throughout adolescence and young adulthood, individuals often engage in a process of critical reflection and reevaluation of their inherited beliefs. This period is characterized by increased autonomy and a desire for self-definition, leading many to actively question, modify, or even reject their childhood religious upbringing.

Religious awareness acknowledges the presence of an afterlife that will ultimately reconcile the contradictions faced by individuals on earth. The belief in God serves as a pillar of support for individuals, assuring that goodness will prevail over malevolence. The devout individual understands how to live in accordance with divine principles, while a lack of belief is equated with forfeiture of elevated moral values (Bolsbaeva, 2013).

In this review, our emphasis is not solely on social identity itself; rather, we consider elements of social identity that are pertinent to the personal identity of adolescents. This includes their involvement in exploring their socio-cultural background and developing a more defined understanding of how this background or group identity influences their self-concept (Wu, 2010), and this study did not make further distinctions regarding age to analyze patterns of change associated with age. In contrast, two other longitudinal studies indicated that self-concept clarity remained stable for girls between the ages of 13 and 18, while it exhibited a slight increase followed by a decrease for boys (Crocetti, 2016). It was observed that self-concept clarity evolved in a nonlinear manner between the ages of 17 and 23, exhibiting an initial decrease from 16 to 17, which was subsequently followed by a rise until the age of 23 (Crocetti, 2016).

Social influences, such as peer groups, educational experiences, and exposure to diverse cultures and respective, also play a crucial role in shaping religious identity during these formative years. The concept of «border experiences» – significant life events such as near-death experiences, profound loss, or moments of intense spiritual awakening – can significantly impact the trajectory of religious identity formation. These transformative encounters can lead to a re-evolution of beliefs of someone, prompting a deepening of faith, a shift in religious affiliation, or even a complete abandonment of previously held beliefs.

The problem of religious identity processes among the population of Kazakhstan in the conditions of a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional society is of great importance for the development, strengthening of stability, peace, and harmony (Kabidenova, 2016).

Social gender identity relates to an individual's perception of belonging to a particular gender category, such as male, female, or another group. Conversely, personal gender identity focuses on the sense of uniqueness one experiences within their chosen gender group. Both social and personal gender identities are interconnected and contribute to the formation of a coherent self-concept. Their interaction likely fosters a deeper, multidimensional understanding of gendered selfhood (Crocetti, 2018).

The foundational role of personality traits and identity processes in shaping youth religious orientation is well established. In their seminal longitudinal study involving 351 female college students, Luyckx, Soenens, and Goossens (2006) assessed the bidirectional relationship between identity dimensions – namely commitment-making, exploration in breadth and depth,

and identification with commitment – and the Big Five personality traits. Through cross-lagged and latent growth curve modeling, they demonstrated that (a) identity development influences personality trajectories and (b) personality traits concurrently frame identity exploration and commitment processes (Soenens, 2006). For example, higher levels of conscientiousness predicted stronger identity commitment, suggesting that certain personality dispositions foster more sustained engagement with personal values – including religious beliefs. Conversely, identity exploration was associated with increases in openness and agreeableness; this suggests that the process of identity formation can influence overall personality characteristics. These reciprocal dynamics intimate that religious identity emerges from an evolving interplay: psychological tendencies of young people both enable and are reshaped by their religious exploration and commitment.

The impact of such experiences often depends on the pre-existing individual religious framework, their coping mechanisms, and the support they receive from their social network. Research suggests that individuals with a strong pre-existing sense of religious identity are more likely to experience these events as confirming and strengthening their faith, while those with a more fragile or ambivalent faith may find their belief challenged or even shattered. Furthermore, the concept of «spiritual intelligence», the ability to understand and apply spiritual knowledge to challenges of life, is increasingly recognized as a crucial component of religious identity formation and development.

In the current article, we do not focus on social identity per se; however, we include aspects of social identity that are relevant for the personal identity of adolescents. Such as their engagement in exploration of their social-cultural, religious background, and forming a clear sense of what this background or group identity means for their self-concept.

Identity construction does not occur in a vacuum; however, within diverse sociocultural frameworks. Schwartz et al. (2012) advance a global model of identity development, demonstrating significant cultural variation in the identity formation processes across multiple international cohorts. Though not focused on religiosity per se, this global gaze underscores the role of religion as a salient identity domain influenced by normative contexts: in collectivist societies, for instance, religious identity may serve as a conduit for personal exploration or selective adherence (Branje, 2021). Qualitative research among religious leaders in Burkina Faso by Barri et al. (2021) reveals yet another: institutional authority significantly frames contraceptive perceptions and behaviors. Through in-depth interviews with local religious figures, the authors uncovered that the theological beliefs of leaders and interpretations profoundly influence community attitudes toward modern contraception.

The research of Wnuk (2017) provides a valuable understanding of the internal factors shaping religious commitment in young people. Employing the Santa Carla Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSORFQ), the study examined the strength of personal faith in university students from Poland and Chile, two countries with a constraining cultural background. The findings revealed that religious dedication of young people is not simply a product of their involvement in organized religious activities; however, is significantly linked to their personal spiritual experiences, their individual search for meaning, and their psychological coping (Wnuk, 2017).

Cultural influences significantly impacted how religious faith was expressed and motivated. Polish students, predominantly from a Catholic-dominated society, showed more consistent patterns. Chilean students displayed a wider range of affiliations and beliefs. However, in both Poland and Chile, personal internalized faith emerged as a key element of religious dedication, rather than outward religious practices. These results emphasize the significance of examining both a personal spirituality of individual and their cultural background when exploring the reasons behind religious beliefs of young people. They demonstrate that religious dedication frequently stems from a deep connection to personal existential needs and emotional strength, rather than simply adhering to doctrines or succumbing to social pressure within a religious community (Wunk, 2017).

The self-perception of individual identity shaped alongside the establishment of their social and gender-related roles, as well as their tolerance towards the opposite sex, is a natural part of the Self; the more developed and formed all the components of religious identity are among young Kazakhs. The identification-group component ranks second in terms of connectivity, indicating that the evolution of religious identity is closely linked to the identification of an individual, such as a member of a familiar social group (Kenesbayev, 2022).

In Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, cultural and historical factors play a significant role in shaping how religious identity is perceived and expressed among youth. Unlike societies such as Poland (with a dominant Catholic tradition) or Chile (characterized by diverse religious affiliations), religion in Central Asia is often viewed through the lens of ethnicity, tradition, and family upbringing, rather than solely as a matter of individual spiritual conviction.

In Kazakhstan, as noted by Aimaganbetova et al. (2024), Muslim youth emphasize social and collective aspects of religious identity, whereas Orthodox Christian youth are more likely to demonstrate a personal and internalized approach to faith (Aimaganbetova, 2024). Similar patterns are observed in neighboring Central Asia countries such as Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, where religious affiliation is closely intertwined with national identity, and tradition plays a central role in the religious socialization of young people (Burova, 2020).

Thus, as in cases of Poland and Chile, youth in Central Asia often prioritize personal, internalized beliefs over outward religious observance. Their religious identity is shaped not merely by adherence to institutional doctrines but through deep connections with national, familial, and historical traditions, reflecting a uniquely contextualized expression of spirituality.

Comparative studies indicate that a significant proportion of Central Asia youth consider religion an important part of their culture, yet rarely engage in formal religious practices. This reflects a predominance of cultural rather than doctrinal religiosity. For example, many young people identify such as «believers», yet may not strictly observe religious rituals or fasting, viewing their faith as a symbol of spiritual and ethnic identity rather than religious obligation

This involves self-awareness, compassion, and the capacity for introspection. Individuals with higher spiritual intelligence are better equipped to navigate the complexities of faith, to reconcile conflicting beliefs, and to integrate their religious identity into a coherent and meaningful life. The development of spiritual intelligence is not solely dependent on religious upbringing; it can be fostered through various means, including mindfulness practices, meditation, and engagement with philosophical and spiritual literature. Ultimately, a mature and well-integrated religious

identity is not simply a matter of adhering to a set of doctrines; however involves a continuous process of growth, reflection, and integration, shaping understanding of the individual, their place in the world, and their relationship with the transcendent.

While Cummings et al. (2015) study focused on older adults, their study through psychometric analysis of the Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSRFQ) offers valuable insights for its use in a wider range of research, extending to the study of youth religious belief. Significantly, the scale demonstrated a strong positive relationship with well-established measures of religious and spiritual coping, indicating that individuals with greater faith tend to rely more on their beliefs for support during stressful or emotionally challenging situations. Although the initial study focused on older adults, the idea that religious faith serves as a psychological and emotional buffer against challenges may also apply to younger people experiencing identity struggles, uncertainty, and social pressures. Additionally, the study employing item Response Theory (IRT), found that the SCSRFQ is especially adept at detecting low to moderate levels of religious devotion; however, it struggles to distinguish between highly religious individuals. This finding is particularly important when examining youth, a group where religious beliefs can fluctuate greatly and where personal faith may be more complex than outwardly expressed religious practices (Cummings, 2015).

Researchers Goodman and Dyer (2023) explored the impact of religiosity on adolescent outcomes in a study involving 636 families from Utah. They focused on three aspects of youth religiosity: religious salience, intrinsic religiosity, and daily religious experiences. The findings showed that religious salience and daily religious involvement were linked, both directly and indirectly, to reduced levels of delinquency and anxiety. These effects were mediated by character development and social connectivity, aligning with the principles of Positive Youth Development (PYD) and the model of Bronfenbrenner PPCT (Goodman, 2023).

These findings indicate that embracing religious faith early in life goes beyond simply expressing internal motivational drives. It also promotes the growth of moral character and strengthens social connections, serving as a protective factor against negative behavioral and psychological challenges.

Within their cultural routines, young people engaged in religious practices exhibit a deep social and cultural dedication to understanding intricate religious texts (Regnerus, 2003). This approach allows us to explore how young people engage with religion, grounded in the commitments shaped by their current experiences. The tree-factor identity model posits that individuals begin adolescence with an initial set of commitments, formed through childhood associations in key ideological and interpersonal areas such as education and friendships (Meeus, 2010).

Table 1

Religious identity status		
External religious identity status	Internalized religious identity status	Seeking religious identity status
This describes a perspective on religion, characterized by limited openness and curiosity towards both the world and religious values. It also highlights a fear	This perspective is defined by internally chosen religious belief and a high degree of openness and inquisitiveness towards the world, including the realm of religious	It is characterized by a tendency towards religious fluidity, uncertainty about own faith of someone, a searching within the confines of their declared

of challenging the boundaries of personal autonomy, as well as the autonomy of individuals with differing beliefs, and a reluctance to engage in religious dialogue.	values, without compromising a sense of security. It also involves forming close relationships without apprehension of breaching personal boundaries, including connections with individuals of drivers faiths, as well as a willingness to engage in religious dialogue.	religion, a superficial approach to exploring spirituality, and an openness to influences from other religious traditions.
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Rydz, 2017)

Participants

The study included 31 participants, from 18 to 35 aged bachelor students, master's students and PhD students of Al-Farabi Kazakh National University

N=31 (including 19 women)

Age 18-35

M=26.5; SD=4

Custer analysis identified three distinct groups.

1) External religious identity (N=10)

2) Seeking religious identity (N=12)

3) Internalized religious identity (N=8)

Table 2

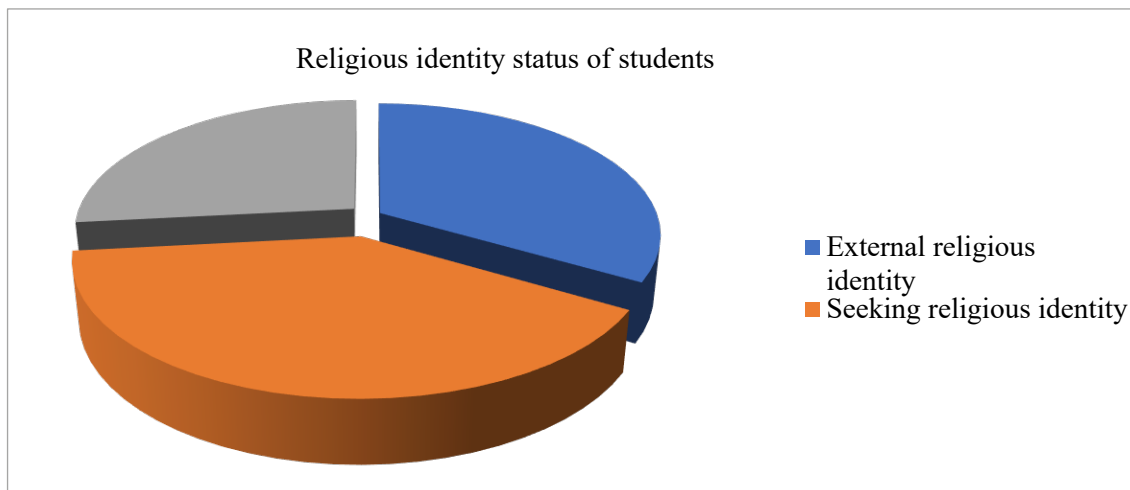


Table 3

	External religious identity		Seeking religious identity		Internalized religious identity		ANOVA		
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	F	p	Scheffe
Religious significance	3.65	0.55	2.9	0.80	3.2	0.58	11.6	<001	2<1,2

Tables are exploring the connection between various types of religious identity and how participants view the significance of religion in their lives. All 31 participants were categorized into three distinct identity groups. The External category included individuals who follow religious norms primarily due to external pressures or societal expectations. The Seeking group consisted of those actively investigating or questioning their faith. Lastly, the Internalized category represented individuals who have deeply incorporated their religious beliefs as a fundamental aspect of their personal identity.

The results of the ANOVA revealed statistically significant differences in the centrality of religiosity among the three religious identity groups ($F=11.6$, $p<001$). Participants with an external religious identity reported the highest level of religious significance ($M=3.65$, $SD=0.55$), suggesting that religion plays a prominent role in their lives, likely maintained through social expectations, tradition, or institutional affiliation. Although this identity may not always involve deep internal conviction, religion still holds a meaningful and structured place in the worldview of an individual.

The internalized religious identity group demonstrated a moderate level of religious significance ($M=3.20$, $SD=0.58$). While slightly lower than the external group, this score reflects a more personal and stable integration of religious values into the core of individual belief. For these individuals, religion is likely internalized and reflective, rather than externally driven.

The lowest religious significance was observed in the seeking religious identity group ($M=2.90$, $SD=0.80$), indicating a phase of active exploration where religion may not yet have a clearly defined or stable role in the life of an individual. These individuals might still be questioning, reevaluating, or searching for spiritual meaning.

Post hoc Scheffe tests confirmed that the seeking group differs significantly from both the external and internalized identity groups ($2<1$, 2), reinforcing the notion that religious significance increases with greater structure and clarity in religious identity.

In summary, the finding suggests that the degree of religious significance is closely related to how religious identity is formed and experienced. Individuals with more structured or internalized identities assign greater importance to religion, while those in a transitional or exploratory stage perceive it as less central to their lives.

Conclusion

The religious commitment of young people is a nuanced and dynamic phenomenon, shaped by the interplay of psychological, social, and cultural factors.

This study highlights that youth engagement with religion often stems not from passive inheritance but from active exploration, personal meaning-making, and identity development. While the influence of family and early religious socialization remains pivotal, individual agency becomes increasingly significant during adolescence and early adulthood, as young people strive to reconcile inherited beliefs with lived experiences. Their motivations for religious commitment vary, encompassing the search for existential meaning, a sense of belonging within a community, moral guidance, and emotional support to navigate the complexities of life. Moreover, exposure to diverse perspectives and the pluralistic nature of modern society encourage more individualized and varied expressions of religiosity among the younger generation. Gaining insight into these motivations is vital for understanding the shifting patterns of youth religiosity and for crafting more effective strategies in religious education,

pastoral care, and intergenerational dialogue. Ultimately, religious commitment in youth is best viewed as a fluid and developmental process, intricately tied to broader identity formation and the enduring search for purpose in an ever-changing world.

The initial phase of the study focused on qualitative content analysis uncovered substantial variations in how students express and perceive their religious identities. Participant narratives highlighted three distinct identity positions: religiosity driven by external factors such as tradition and societal pressures, a period of active spiritual exploration, and a deeply personal and ingrained religious outlook. These qualitative insights served as the foundation for the subsequent quantitative phase, during which participants were categorized for statistical analysis. Numerical findings corroborated and expanded upon the trends discovered through content analysis. Notably, statistically significant disparities were detected in both the prominence of religiosity and the personal significance attributed to religion across the three distinct identity categories (external, seeking and internalized). These observed distinctions offer concrete evidence for the qualitative finding that form and development of religious identity are strongly linked to how central religion is to a cognitive of person emotional and behavioral experiences.

Youth navigating their religious identity fall into distinct categories, each impacting their psychological well-being and social interactions. Those with a strongly internalized religious identity demonstrate the most positive outcome. This faith is deeply integrated into their sense of self, creating flexible yet firm boundaries. This internalization fosters openness to interfaith dialogue and a consistent spiritual framework. Research suggests this group exhibits great emotional resilience and a stronger moral compass, leading to increased life satisfaction and prosocial behavior. They are less likely to experience significant religious crises and tend to maintain stable religious affiliations throughout their young adulthood. This stability is not rigidity; however, they possess the capacity for critical reflection and growth within their faith. Conversely, individuals with an externalized religious identity often struggle with a less fulfilling and more precarious spiritual life. Their boundaries are excessively permeable, making them highly susceptible to external influences, including peer pressure and persuasive messaging from various religious or secular groups. This lack of a firm foundation can lead to frequent shifts in belief, increased vulnerability to religious crises, and a greater likelihood of religious conversions – both positive and negative – statuses allow for targeted support to help young people develop healthy and fulfilling relationships with their faith, regardless of their path.

In summary, the results indicate a significant stability in identity synthesis, identity statuses, and the underlying identity processes of commitment, exploration, and reconsideration across adolescence and young adulthood; however, when there is developmental change, this change is mostly in the direction of maturation in identity. The formation and development of religious identity is a lifelong, dynamic process shaped by an intricate interplay of cognitive, emotional, social, and experiential factors. Far from being static or monolithic, religiosity evolves across the lifespan, influenced by early familial and cultural contexts, critical periods of self-reflection during adolescence and young adulthood, and transformative life events that challenge or reaffirm a spiritual or individual framework. The role of spiritual intelligence further underscores the complexity of this process, highlighting the importance of self-awareness, introspection, and existential engagement in the integration of religious beliefs into a coherent personal worldview. Ultimately, religious identity is not merely the internalization of doctrinal tenets, but a multifaceted construct that encompasses belief, practice, community affiliation, and a deeper

sense of meaning and purpose. The comprehensive understanding of religious identity thus requires an interdisciplinary approach, attentive to psychological development, sociocultural dynamics, and the profound existential questions that define the human experience.

Religious identification provides individuals with a unique sacred perspective and sense of eternal belonging that surpasses the connections found in other social groups. This distinctiveness suggests that religious community. The foundation of a positive social group, intertwined with a system of unwavering guiding principles, offers religious identity a dual benefit, significantly contributing to the enhancement of overall well-being.

Overall, Cummings et al. (2015) reinforce the validity of the SCSRFQ such as a robust tool for assessing personal religious commitment. Its demonstrated reliability and sensitivity to faith as a source of emotional resilience make it a valuable instrument for exploring the motivational underpinnings of religious engagement among youth, especially within pluralistic or secular cultural settings.

However, these results indicate that identity formation necessitates a concentration on transitional phases that challenge personal identities of adolescents, along with an emphasis on the smaller, individual processes involved in identity development. While theory posits that life transitions and events can instigate identity change, empirical evidence supporting the impact of life events on personal identity remains limited. Connecting these narratives to the ongoing development of individual identity will enhance our comprehension of the real-time processes deriving personal identity formation and provide more practical strategies for intervention.

Religious identity is not static; rather, it evolves throughout the life of an individual in response to changing personal, social, and cultural circumstances. Life transitions, experiences, and crises often lead individuals to re-evaluate, strengthen, or modify their religious beliefs and affiliations. This dynamic nature of religious identity highlights the importance of viewing it as a lifelong, context-dependent process.

Authors' contributions

Turysbekova D.A. – writing the article text, literature review, and analysis of survey results.

Toleugaliyeva S.T.– writing the article text, text editing.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interest

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