

RELIGIOSITY, FAMILY AND HUMAN CAPITAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF YOUNG POLES' RESEARCH

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Purpose: The article addresses the impact of religiosity on family formation and, in the longer run, on human capital accumulation. It proposes to see religiosity as indirect but important factor in the perspective of economic development.

Design/methodology/approach: Most often human capital is associated with education and health care. It is less frequently attributed to the influence of the family. The paper juxtaposes literature showing how religiosity influences family and how functioning of the family impacts human capital development with presentation of original empirical data on family attitudes and plans of young generation of Poles.

Findings: (1) The article presents the results of research indicating, that (1) family is important for the creation of human capital, (2) religiosity is beneficial to the stability of the family condition. (2) On the basis of empirical survey, the article offers evidence that religiosity is a key feature differentiating young people's attitudes towards marriage, family and parenthood.

Research limitations/implications: It is recommended to develop further research oriented towards examining the relationship between religiosity, family and human capital outcomes.

Practical implications: On the basis of analysis presented in the article it is important - in the perspective of demographic decline and its economic consequences – to study how changes in culture (incl. religiosity) – influence family and human capital development. This is useful for designing social and demographic policies.

Social implications: The article broadens knowledge of the role of religiosity for human capital development, enriching the area of research on the impact of religion and family on economy. The findings improve public opinion' understanding of the role of religious practices and institutions in strengthening the social fabric and economic performance.

Originality/value: The paper offers new proposal to link research on the role of religiosity for the condition of the family to the analysis of the influence of family on human capital.

Keywords: religiosity, family, human capital, economic development, demography.

Category of the paper: General review, Research paper.

1. Introduction

The paper proposes to analyze the issue of human capital development from the perspective of the impact of religiosity on decisions regarding formation and condition of family and, in the long run, on human capital accumulation. It offers example of analysis of religiosity seen as indirect but important factor in the perspective of economic development. The paper examines the potential area of research oriented towards the relationship between religiosity, family' formation and functioning, and human capital development.

As it is known, human capital understood as "(...) the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes embodied in individuals that facilitate the creation of personal, social and economic well-being" (OECD, 2001, p. 18) is a significant factor determining the efficiency and development potential of economic systems. As Wojciech Jarecki observes, "the fundamental issue for the use and accumulation of human capital in the long term is investment in its creation. On a macroeconomic scale, these will directly affect the economic development of a country, through the strict link between human capital and the functioning of enterprises and their competitiveness" (Jarecki, 2003, pp. 30-31). It is also known that the family is a key institution for the development of human capital. However, the family's situation - especially in the context of the formation of new families and the fulfilment of the procreative function within it - has generally weakened in recent years. This should be an important sign for researchers and practitioners dealing with economic policy, as changes in the demographic potential on the one hand and, on the other, in the socialization and educational potential of families, may herald deficits in, among other things, the availability of human capital in terms of quantity and quality, which will consequently pose a challenge to economic development.

The present article uses the results of a nationwide survey of young Polish women and men aged 16-25 - published in 2023 in the report "Young Polish Women, Young Polish Men and their Family Plans" (Gizicka, Michalski, Szwarc, 2023) - which clearly indicate that religiosity is an important factor influencing the attitudes of the young generation towards marriage and parenthood. According to the analyses made, more religious individuals are also more inclined to start a family and take up a parental role, which allows - also in comparison with the results of other studies - to put forward a thesis on the importance of religiosity for the accumulation of human capital.

In a wider approach, the paper is part of an unprecedented, albeit seemingly still evolving, current of research on the influence of religion on economic development. In the twentieth century, such analyses were carried out by, for example, Max Weber or Peter Berger, and in the current century, we owe a return to this perspective largely to Robert J. Barro and Rachel M. McCleary (Barro, McCleary, 2003). We should, of course, also mention here the research on the impact of culture on the economy, which has received much attention in the last few decades through authors such as Huntington and Harrison (2000), Landes (1999), Acemoglu and

Robinson (2012), and others. In this approach, although religion is not often indicated explicitly, it is nevertheless also present – knowing that it is an essential component of any culture. Therefore, our analyses can legitimately be seen as an attempt to detail and illustrate how religion influences economic development. The development of research of this type seems particularly necessary in the context of contemporary cultural transformations significantly shaped by the process of secularization (Mariański, 2017).

The scheme of reasoning we are trying to propose in this paper is shown in the graphic below (Figure 1).

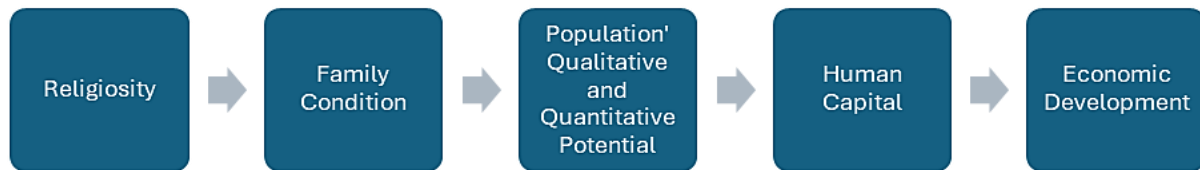


Figure 1. From Religiosity to Economic Development – scheme of analysis.

Source: Authors.

2. Human capital versus family and demography

The links between the category and at the same time the concept of human capital and the institution of the family go back almost to its origins associated with Theodore W. Schultz, and the researcher who made by far the greatest contribution to pointing out this link was undoubtedly Gary S. Becker. This economist stated that:

“no discussion of human capital can omit the influence of families on the knowledge, skills, values, and habits of their children. (...) Parents have a large influence on the education, marital stability, and many other dimensions of their children’s lives” (Becker, 1993, p. 21).

This means that there is a systematic transmission of norms, customs, knowledge and skills from parents to children every day within the family. As Giza-Poleszczuk points out:

„(...) the economic role of the family in reproducing "human capital" has long been recognised - not only in the sense of bringing to life and "investing" in children's education, skills or "taste" (cultural capital), but in the everyday sense of resting, regenerating or even enhancing individual motivation in the external sphere (work, public activities, etc.)” (Giza-Poleszczuk, 2005, p. 18).

In this context, it is also worth recalling the original concept of Jan Jacek Sztudynger, who introduces the category of 'family social capital' into the discussion of the family's contribution to society and the economy. It is defined as “(...) the ties between family members that serve their cooperation and are not at odds with the social interest. These ties are expressed in attitudes of respect, trust, love, interest, help and care for family members” (Sztudynger, 2022, p. 100).

In highlighting the importance of family influence for human capital accumulation, it is also worth citing research that indicates that family structure is important for children's well-being and development. As Terry-Ann L. Craigie, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, and Jane Waldfogel write:

“research has significantly linked early childhood experiences to human capital accumulation and later success. (...) A substantial body of research in the United States confirms that the structure of the family into which a child is born and raised affects child wellbeing. The seminal study by McLanahan and Sandefur (1994) showed that children born to two-parent families had the lowest risk of being a high school dropout, pregnant teen, and idle; these children even had better adult outcomes. However, not all two-parent families are created equal. The children of cohabiting families are shown to have worse outcomes relative to children of married parents” (Craigie, Brooks-Gunn, Waldfogel, 2012).

To show the full picture, it should also be added that obviously families - although they play a fundamental role in the accumulation of human capital - are not the only institutions that have an impact in this regard. Alongside them, the education and healthcare systems are also important contributors. What is interesting and important at the same time, is that the effectiveness of their influence is dependent on whether the family environment functions in an appropriate way. This means that without a stable and efficient family, the functioning of other institutions shaping and supporting the accumulation of human capital in the young generation will be less effective. Katharine G. Abraham and Christopher Mackie make this point as follows:

“(...) parental time inputs are critical to the development of children’s intellectual and emotional readiness to learn. Parental time inputs that create a foundation for learning can be viewed as skill-enhancing investments in human capital. Likewise, family care augments the inputs of the medical care system in the production of health, another investment output that yields a flow of future benefits” (Abraham, Mackie, 2005, p. 80).

At the same time, the aforementioned authors highlight a fact that seems to be often left out, and thus overlooked. Namely, it is most often assumed that the state of health in society is solely a derivative of the functioning of the health service, and that the level and quality of education is the effect of the educational system alone. In reality, however, it turns out that we are dealing with the combined influence of, on the one hand, these institutions and, on the other, the situation that prevails in the family environment.

The relationship between the course of demographic processes - particularly in terms of fertility - and the condition of human capital may seem somewhat less straightforward. Here, however, it should be noted that the starting condition for the accumulation of human capital is the biological reproduction of the population, i.e. the birth of new children who, as a result of parental care and the process of socialization, will become independent and productive members of society in the future. In such a context, it is useful to refer to the concept of sustainable development, which is so influential today. While this concept places a great deal of importance on the optimal use of natural resources and their preservation in sufficient

quantity for future generations, such an approach seems to be lacking precisely in relation to the issue of the family and its demographic potential (Michalski, 2014). Thus, although so valued in modern economics, human capital has not yet acquired what might be defined as its ecology (Michalski, 2020).

3. Religiosity and the condition of the family

When it comes to the impact of religiosity on the condition of the family, its benefits seem evident based on the available literature. In the case of the marriage institution, it appears that there is a strong relationship between religiosity and the situation in the relationship, as the religious dimension influences the bond between the spouses, which in turn reinforces marital satisfaction and emotional proximity (Boulis, Torgler, 2023, p. 2). In regard to parent-child relationships, religiosity is an important factor in their formation, with religion fostering the reduction and elimination of unacceptable behaviors, and at the same time supporting and developing those that strengthen relationships and cohesion within the family (Krok, 2016, p. 2). Other studies, in turn, indicate that participation in religious practices develops solidarity between family members (Christiano, 2000), reinforces moral and ethical values in family life (Edgell, 2006), and fosters greater psychological and spiritual closeness between parents and adolescents, which proves beneficial in the long term (Petts, 2014). In general, religiosity is associated with closer family relationships (Pearce, Axinn 1998; Regnerus, Burdette 2006), and as Mahoney and colleagues (2003) found, religiosity results in a 'sanctification' of family life, which leads, among other things, to parents becoming more actively involved in family interactions (Smith, 2020, p. 337).

Furthermore, religiosity has been shown to have a strong effect on the stability of family relationships (Boulis, Torgler, 2023, p. 21), and to positively influence the stability of the entire family environment (Boulis, Torgler, 2023, p. 4). According to Dariusz Krok's research, adolescents and middle-aged people, who are characterized by a positive and accepting attitude towards religion, have a lasting foundation that enables them to maximize their well-being (Krok, 2016, p. 13).

As other studies have found, it is relevant whether partners or spouses are of the same religion. When this is the case, then a shared faith has a more stabilising effect on the relationship (Ellison, Burdette, Wilcox 2010; Mahoney, 2010) than for couples of different religions, and compared to other couples (Boulis, Torgler, 2023, p. 3).

4. Religiosity and family plans of young Poles

The research team of the Institute for Family and Society Studies foundation ('Instytut Wiedzy o Rodzinie i Społeczeństwie') conducted a representative survey among 16-25 year olds on family preferences and plans, with reference to different characteristics such as sex, age, domicile and religiosity¹. Two questions regarding religion are particularly significant in this aspect: the preferred form of personal life and the expected number of children. This paper presents an analysis of the relationship between the aforementioned questions and attitude towards religion, which was expressed on a 5-point Likert scale (from 1-definitely non-believer to 5- deep believer). A chi-square test of independence and a correspondence analysis were used to assess the relationship between the studied characteristics.

The results indicate a significant link between attitude to faith and the preferred form of personal life, as well as the expected number of children. Young people who declare themselves to be deep believers are significantly more likely to indicate marriage with children as the most appropriate form of adult life for them than those who are definitely non-believers (Figure 2).

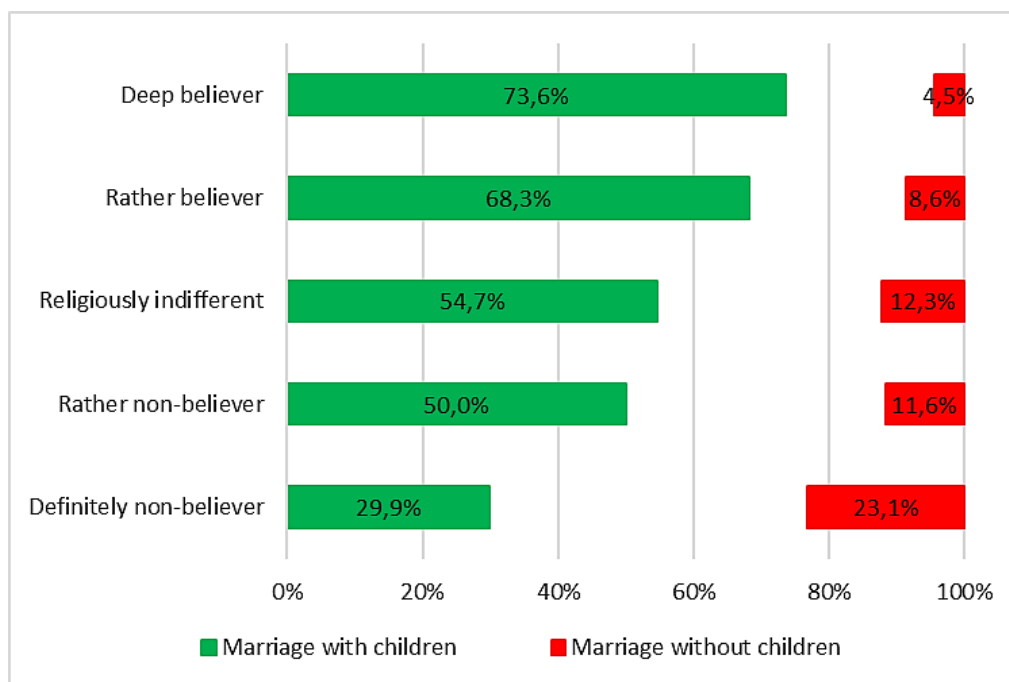


Figure 2. Percentages of respondents preferring for themselves marriage with children and marriage without children according to attitude to religion.

Source: own compilation based on data from the Institute for Family and Society Studies.

¹ The survey was conducted on a sample of 1000 people representative of sex, age and voivodeship of residence. The study was carried out on September 8-12, 2022 through the research company IQS Sp. z o. o. The Computer-Assisted Web Interview (CAWI) technique was used. The form consisted of 29 questions, most of them closed. Ultimately, the analysis covered the responses of 909 people aged 16-25. The full research report is available at <https://iworis.pl/badania-iworis>.

The relationship between the characteristics in question is statistically significant at the $p < 0.001$ level. The aforementioned links were also identified on the basis of correspondence analysis. In Figure 3, there are clusters of points to assess that non-believers are more prone to marriage without children and informal relationships. Believers, on the other hand, prefer marriage with children.

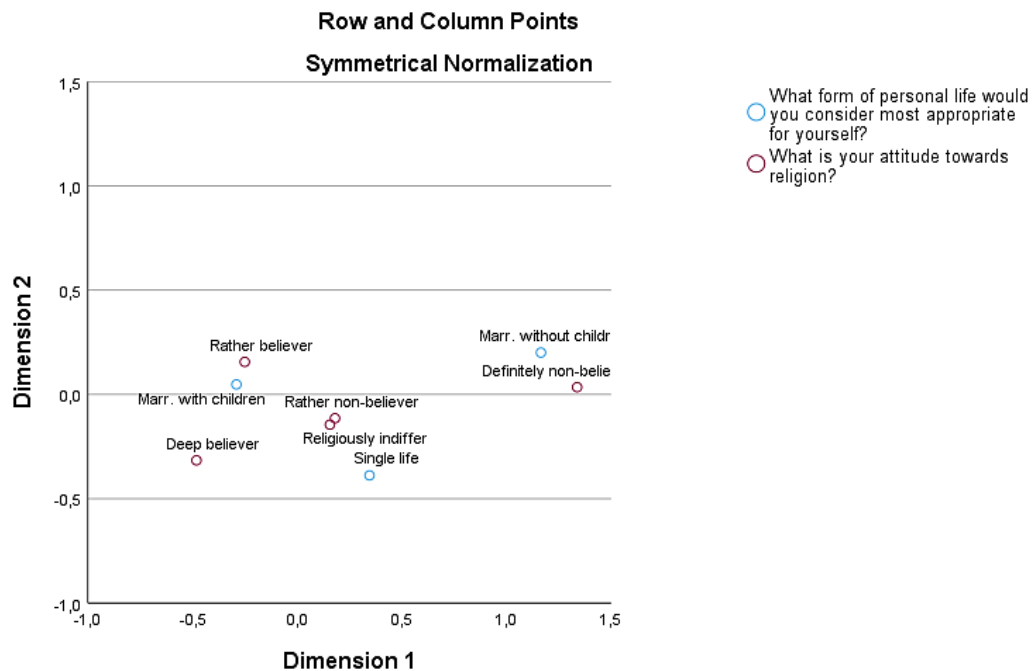


Figure 3. Preferred form of life - marriage with children or marriage without children (scatter plot based on correspondence analysis between attitude to religion and preferred form of personal life).

Source: own compilation based on data from the Institute for Family and Society Studies.

Based on the analyses conducted, a positive direction of the relationship between attitude to faith and the expected number of children can be observed: the more religious a person is, the more children they want to have. Almost half of those who declare themselves to be definitely non-believers do not want to have children at all, with 6% of respondents among deep believers expressing such expectations. An inverse relationship was observed in relation to the wish to have large families. Almost 50% of the most religious people want to have at least three children, compared to 11% among non-believers (Figure 4).

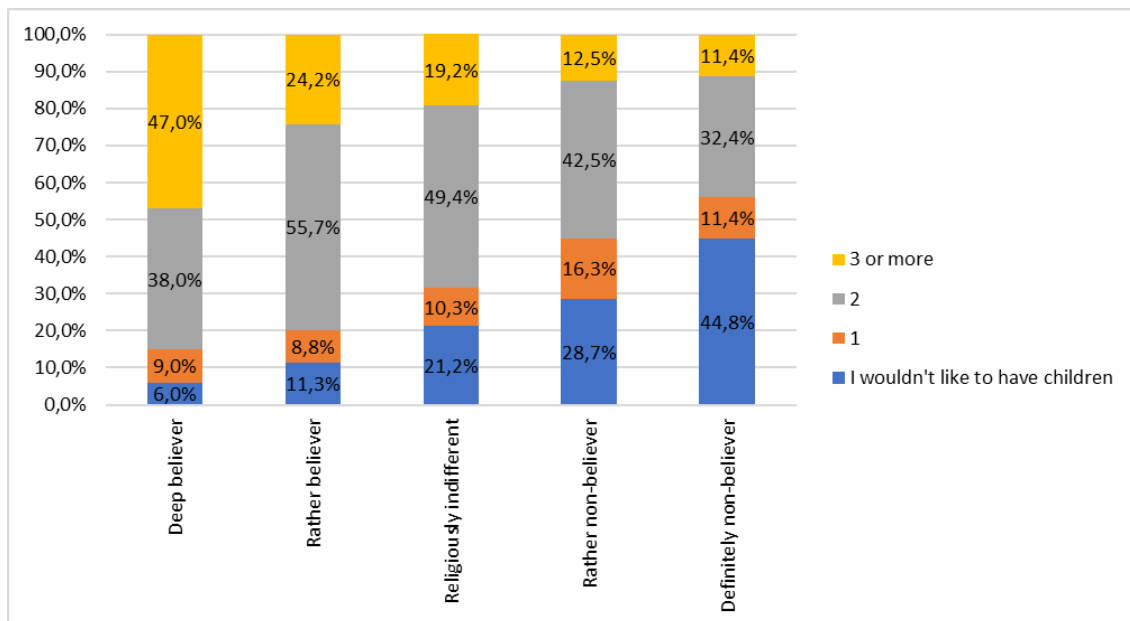


Figure 4. Structure of respondents according to expected number of children (without the "hard to say" option) and attitude to religion.

Source: own compilation based on data from the Institute for Family and Society Studies.

Once again, a statistically significant relationship was obtained at $p < 0.001$. This is confirmed by the scatter plot obtained in the course of the correspondence analysis. With the category "I would not like to have children", indications of non-believers are visible, while with the "more children" option it is possible to notice people with a high assessment of their attitude towards religion.

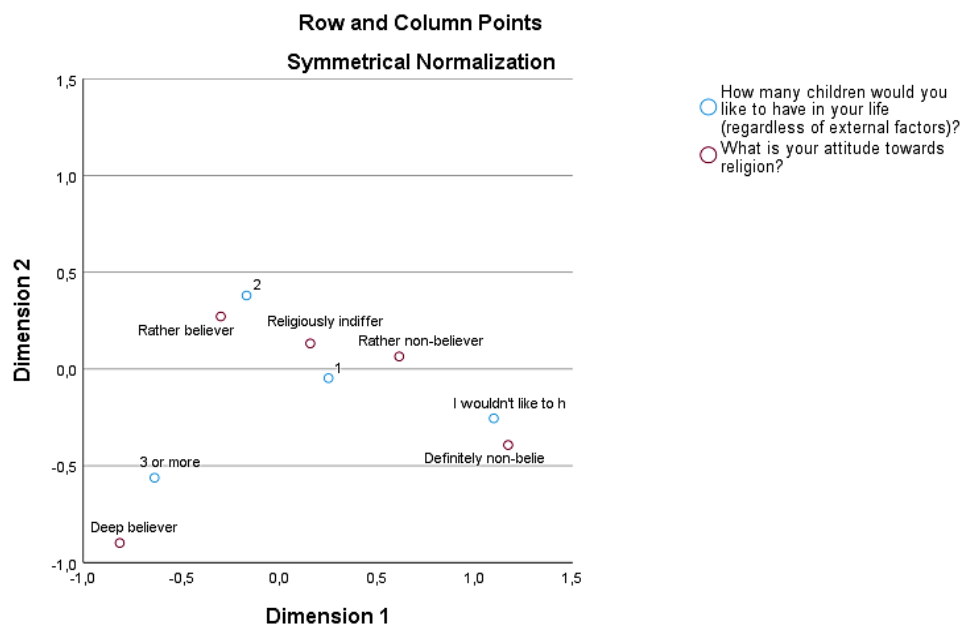


Figure 5. Preferred number of children (scatter plot based on correspondence analysis between attitude to religion and expected number of children)

Source: own compilation based on data from the Institute for Family and Society Studies.

Besides declarations concerning the preferred form of life and fertility, it is worth noting the perception of marriage as a relationship which offers the possibility of emotional and economic support as well as an institution to which the upbringing of children - and consequently the creation of human capital - belongs. Young Poles aged 16-25, regardless of socio-demographic characteristics, consider marriage as an institution in which it is easier to run a household (55.6%) and easier to obtain support from another person (49.7%). Every fourth respondent (41.5%) agrees with the opinion that it is better for children to be raised by married couples (Figure 6).

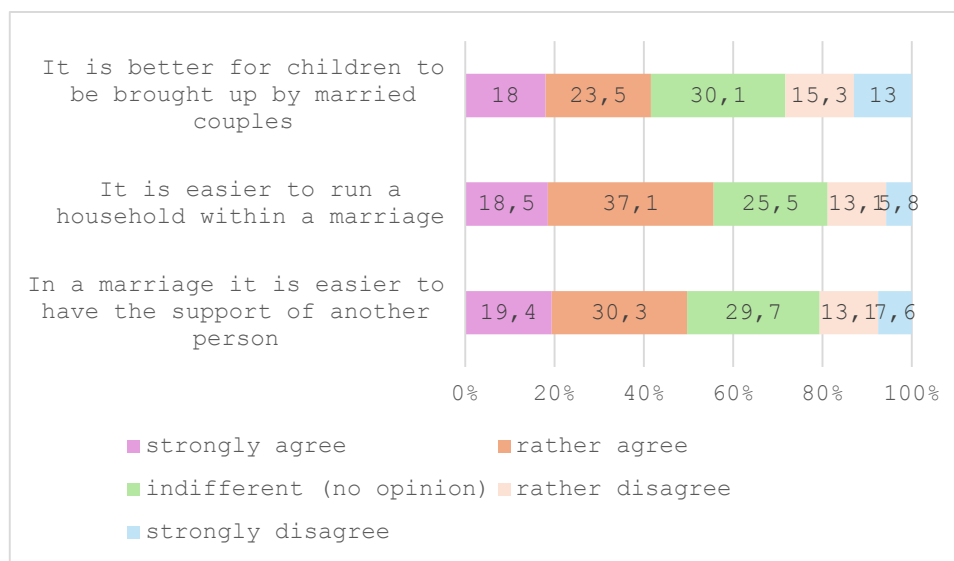


Figure 6. Opinions on marriage (Structure of respondents according to degree of agreement with selected statements of character on marriage).

Source: own compilation based on data from the Institute for Family and Society Studies.

Also in this case, a statistically significant correlation at the $p < 0.001$ level is apparent between the attitude to religion and the evaluation of statements concerning marriage. When analysing the mean ratings of agreement with the given statements, calculated on the basis of giving ranks to the indicated options (1 - strongly disagree, ..., 5 - strongly agree), a clear difference is noticeable in practically all the rated statements. The higher the average, the higher the support for a given statement. The analysis shows that the group of deep believers shows the highest averages in all cases, while the definitely non-believers present the lowest ones (cf. Figure 7).

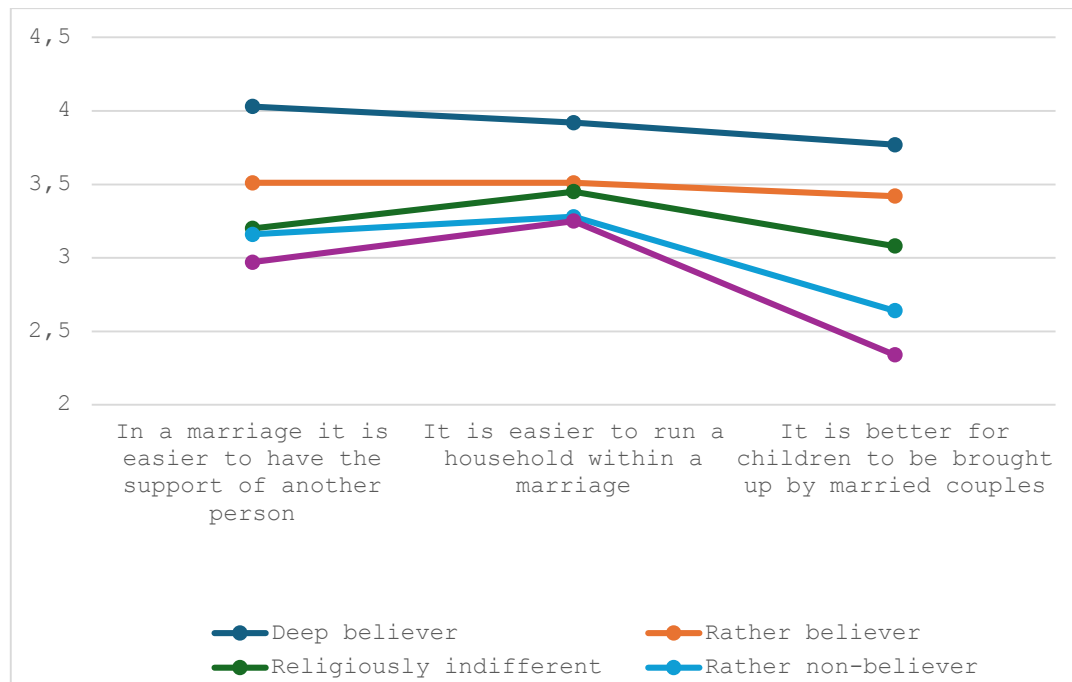


Figure 7. Mean ratings of agreement (1 - strongly disagree, ..., 5 - strongly agree) with the analyzed statements about marriage by attitude to religion.

Source: own compilation based on data from the Institute for Family and Society Studies.

When analyzing the averages obtained by the group of deep believers, it can be seen that they do not come into contact with any other group, which means that these opinions are specific to this group only. The group of deep believers most often perceive marriage as providing support in various aspects and consider that it is better for children to be raised by married couples. It can be concluded that the attitude towards religion has a positive influence on the perception of marriage as the most adequate institution for the functioning of the family, which, as the research cited earlier shows, constitutes the basic space for the accumulation of human capital.

The studies presented here included young Poles just entering adulthood and who are yet to make matrimonial and procreative decisions. There are also studies relating to already married individuals showing the positive role of religion for the quality of the relationship. Steuden and Brudek, on the basis of their own research, conclude that "the greater the role played by religious beliefs system in the lives of husbands and wives, the greater their satisfaction with marriage" (2015, p. 21). It seems reasonable to use resources related to religiosity to build stable and satisfying family environments.

5. Conclusion

This paper outlines the links that can be made between religiosity, family life and the accumulation of human capital on the basis of the available literature. This relationship - although it may not seem easy to reconstruct - and its study are needed, as it provides an opportunity to show the impact that secularization and, more broadly, cultural and social changes, have on the area of material reproduction, which is the economy. The category used here, which seems to be a useful link between the functioning of the family and the economic dimension of society, is human capital.

The paper puts forward a thesis on the indirect influence of religiosity on human capital accumulation. As a result of the analyses made and with the use of the results of the author's research, an attempt was made to illustrate it. On this basis, it seems reasonable to claim that the accumulation of human capital necessary for Poland's further development will be hindered if the situation in terms of the transformation of the family condition – conditioned, among other things, by the transformation of religiosity – does not improve.

It seems that a certain limitation of the analysis is its main assumption, i.e. the thesis about the indirect impact of religiosity on the development of human capital. The assumption of indirect influence assumes the possibility of the existence of other, significant factors that – at the same time – may also be factors disturbing the examined relationships. Further analysis should be conducted to comprehensively capture the structure of factors related to religious life. In the conducted research, the factor of religiosity was based only on self-declaration of faith. For conducting further research, it would certainly be necessary to expand the indicators related to religiosity. It also seems important to monitor implemented reproductive plans in the context of changes in religiosity, also from an individual perspective.

Nevertheless, in the context of the current demographic challenges and changes in the condition and functioning of the family, it seems reasonable to seek ways and solutions that would be able to build and strengthen the potential of religiosity. This also seems relevant considering the ongoing process of secularization, which significantly influences the shape of contemporary culture and thus the values, norms and beliefs relevant to the formation and functioning of families.

In the light of the declining number of marriages, low fertility rates and the breakdown of families, it seems reasonable to look for educational, informational and promotional solutions that would communicate, encourage and strengthen the image of marriage and the family as an institution with a multidimensional positive impact, both socially and individually. At the same time it seems important to support and strengthen the impact of religious institutions and the entities working with them, especially in the context of their influence on families and young generations.

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