



The University of the West Indies
St. Augustine Campus
Faculty of Humanities and Education
Caribbean Studies Project
HUMN 3099

Student name: Davina-Farah Deonath_____

Student ID no.: _816024679_____

Degree Program: BA French and Spanish

Supervisor: __Paola Palma_____

Title of Thesis:

“Is Atheism rising in Trinidad's youth?” a case study among students of the UWI to explore their attitudes towards religion and spirituality in a traditionally religious society.

Declaration

1. I declare that this thesis has been composed solely by myself and that it has not been submitted, in whole or in part, in any previous application for a degree. Except where stated otherwise by reference or acknowledgment, the work presented is entirely my own.
2. I authorise The University of the West Indies to make a physical or digital copy of my thesis/research paper/project report for its preservation, for public reference, and for the purpose of inter-library loan.
3. I consent to have my attached thesis used in any publication comprising Caribbean Studies Projects by The University of the West Indies. I understand that I will receive no compensation. I hereby assign publishing rights for the contribution to The University of the West Indies, including all copyrights.

Signature of Student: Davina-Farah Deonath Date: 13/04/23

THE UNIVERSITY OF THE WEST INDIES
The Office of the Board for Undergraduate Studies

INDIVIDUAL PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

This declaration is being made in accordance with the University Regulations on Plagiarism (First Degrees, Diplomas and Certificate) and should be attached to all work submitted by a student to be assessed as part of or/the entire requirement of the course, other than work submitted in an invigilated examination.

Statement

1. I have read the Plagiarism Regulations as set out in the Faculty Handbook and University websites related to the submission of coursework for assessment.
2. I declare that I understand that plagiarism is the use of another's work pretending that it is one's own and that it is a serious academic offence for which the University may impose severe penalties.
3. I declare that the submitted work indicated below is my own work, except where duly acknowledged and referenced.
4. I also declare that this paper has not been previously submitted for credit either in its entirety or in part within the UWI or elsewhere.
5. I understand that I may be required to submit the work in electronic form and accept that the University may check the originality of the work using a computer-based plagiarism detection service.

TITLE OF ASSIGNMENT – “Is Atheism rising in Trinidad's youth?” a case study among students of the UWI to explore their attitudes towards religion and spirituality in a traditionally religious society

COURSE CODE – HUMN 3099

COURSE TITLE - CARIBBEAN STUDIES PROJECT

STUDENT ID - 816024679

By signing this declaration, you are confirming that the work you are submitting is original and does not contain any plagiarised material.

I confirm that this assignment is my own work, and that the work of other persons has been fully acknowledged.

SIGNATURE - __Davina-Farah Deonath_____

DATE - _____13/04/23_____

ABSTRACT

Global studies have indicated a rise in atheism among young adults however; no current studies have been conducted in Trinidad to explore this concept. Thus, this research paper aimed to explore the perceptions of young adults regarding religion and spirituality as well as to investigate the phenomena of atheism and irreligion among young adults. The objectives of this study were to determine whether atheism was an existing or growing phenomenon in Trinidad among young adults as well as to investigate the religious and spiritual perspectives of young adults. A mixed method approach consisting of questionnaires and interviews was utilised in this study. Questionnaires were administered to twenty five random students of the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus and two in person interviews were conducted using the method of convenient sampling. Data was collected and presented based on specific themes and categories. This study revealed that the majority of young adults consider religion as an important part of their lives although they may not often discuss the topic or participate regularly in religious activities. Furthermore, young adults believed that religion was important in schools, they linked a lack of religion to chaos, crime, and mental health issues, this study showed that atheism among young adults is not a growing phenomenon in Trinidad.

Key word: Atheism. Irreligion, Religion, Spirituality, Young Adults, Trinidad, Non Religious

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

ABSTRACT.....	i
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ii
LIST OF FIGURES	iii
LIST OF APPENDICES.....	iv
INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER ONE	6
CHAPTER TWO	13
CHAPTER THREE	22
CONCLUSION.....	28
WORKS CITED	30
APPENDIX A.....	a
APPENDIX B	<u>b</u>

LIST OF FIGURES

Fig 1. Bar graph illustrating the different levels of the Importance of Religion in the lives of young adults.

Fig 2. Pie Chart depicting the percentage of young adults who stated peer pressure during their teenage years affected their religious beliefs.

Fig 3. Pie chart illustrating the percentage of young adults who agree that religion and spirituality are two different things.

Fig 4. Pie Chart illustrating the percentage of young adults who agree that spirituality is more important in today's society than religion.

Fig 5. Pie Chart illustrating the percentage of young adults who are aware of the role of religious institutions in the process of colonialism and slavery.

Fig 6. Pie Chart indicating the percentage of young adults who agree that a lack of religious belief encourages individual freedom and happiness.

Fig 7. Pie Chart indicating the percentage of young people who agree that a world without religion will bring about chaos and crime.

Fig 8. Pie Chart depicting the percentage of young adults who agree that all schools in Trinidad should be made non denominational.

LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix A: Interview Questions

Appendix B: Questionnaire Sample

INTRODUCTION

Religion has been a tool weaponized by colonial powers from the beginning of time to dominate people keeping them in poverty, examples range from the genocide of the indigenous people in the Caribbean to slavery in America. However, a Gallup Inc. poll in the U.S. found that the poorest states in the country, such as Mississippi and Alabama, were the most religious and compared with countries like Iran, Lebanon and Zimbabwe in terms of the importance given to religion. (Stastna 2013) This fact reveals that despite their difficult standard of living, their religious beliefs were strong unlike the Scandinavian countries of Norway, Denmark and Sweden who although known for their extremely high standard of living are also famously irreligious and atheists. (Steinfels 2009)

The Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life showed that the group Pew refers to as “nones” — “people who self-identify as atheists or agnostics, as well as those who say their religion is ‘nothing in particular,’ had increased from just over 15% to just under 20% of all U.S. adults. (Religion and Unaffiliated 2012) A following 2015 study portrayed them as the fastest growing religious group in the United States. In 2021, Pew Research Center found that in the U.S., roughly 3 in 10 adults are religiously unaffiliated.

This phenomenon has continued to steadily grow throughout the years and has become a global movement leading researchers to classify non religion as the new religion. A new survey conducted by St Mary's University, Twickenham revealed that 91% of 16- to 29-year-olds in the Czech Republic revealed they had no religious affiliation, making them the least religious country in Europe.(Bullivant 3) This study also revealed that between 70% and 80% of young

adults in Estonia, Sweden and the Netherlands also categorize themselves as non-religious.

(Bullivant 3)

RATIONALE

This topic was chosen because of the global rise of atheism among young adults, which has been occurring for the past ten years. Thus, this study will help determine if this phenomenon is also occurring among young people in Trinidad since this topic is not being highlighted or discussed extensively on any major platforms and news outlets in Trinidad. Therefore, this research project will also help by filling the gap in scholarly literature since there is also a lack of recently published local scholarly literature on this topic.

Additionally, daily interactions with friends, acquaintances and strangers have led to the conclusion that some young people are not able to clearly define their religious beliefs. Thus, this study will explore the concepts of religion and spirituality from the perceptions of young adults.

Thesis statement

This case study seeks to explore the phenomenon of irreligion among students aged 20-23 years of the University of the West Indies; St. Augustine Campus, focusing on the perceptions of young people on the topic of religion as well as evaluating if atheism is a new or growing trend in Trinidad's religiously plural society.

This research paper will employ specific parameters such as focusing on Trinidadian university students of The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus, Trinidad. Trinidad is known as a religiously plural society where citizens practise a number of different religions due to the unique racial and ethnic composition of the country. This multicultural composition is linked to the historical context of Trinidad and it has created a multi religious country that is not commonly seen in other Caribbean islands. Furthermore, students who are Trinidadian nationals at the University of the West Indies St. Augustine Campus were chosen as participants in this case study and they were between the ages of 20-23. This age group was chosen because according to Stanford Medicine, “In teen’s brains, the connections between the emotional part of the brain and the decision-making center are still developing—and not always at the same rate and the rational part of a teen’s brain isn’t fully developed and won’t be until age 25 or so.”(Understanding the Teen Brain)

This research study explored the following terms; religion, atheism, agnosticism, godlessness, freethinking, spirituality, belief, religiously plural. A limitation of this study was that a person who agreed to be interviewed decided to not participate in the study.

Objectives

The research paper consists of two research questions listed below:

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of young people toward religion and spirituality in Trinidad?

Research Question 2: Is the phenomenon of irreligion an existing or growing phenomenon in Trinidad.

Furthermore the objectives of this study seek to :

- 1) Explore the religious and spiritual beliefs and practises of young adults
- 2) Discover if young adults are aware of specific religious terminology and concepts
- 3) Investigate the phenomena of irreligion and atheism among young adults

Methodology

This study was conducted over the academic year 2022/2023 at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus. The sample size for this study consisted of twenty seven participants which included twenty five students in the questionnaire and two students were interviewed.

Interviews were conducted among two students of the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus to discover their thoughts and perceptions of religion, irreligion and spirituality. Convenient sampling was used to select the participants for the interview which ensured they had the time and disposition to do the interview, this type of sampling encouraged honesty and openness on the part of the participants. These interviews were conducted in person over a period of two weeks and each interview lasted for thirty minutes.

Questions based on the concepts explored in the interviews were created electronically using Google Forms. These online questionnaires were then distributed to twenty-five random students of The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine Campus via WhatsApp.

This research paper will incorporate the use of qualitative data and will be a social and cultural study based on the themes of religion, spirituality and irreligion.

This study consists of three chapters. The first chapter is the Literature Review which presents and synthesizes various published scholarly works based on the research topic. This existing literature comes from secondary sources such as scholarly journal articles, reports and books. Moreover, the second chapter presents the findings of this study and is entitled presentation of data. It highlights the main results from the interviews and questionnaires. Lastly, the third chapter is a discussion, which analyses and compares the findings of the study with the literature review.

CHAPTER ONE

Literature Review

The term atheism is defined as disbelief or lack of belief in God or gods whereas irreligion refers to an indifference or hostility to religion or a lack of religious belief. Therefore, it is important to note that these two terms cannot be used interchangeably. Thus, this research paper seeks to explore the ideology and rise of atheism and irreligion among young adults in Trinidad and aims to fill a gap in literature given that this topic is still largely unexplored. Thus, this literature review seeks to add to the existing scholarly works based on young adults and their perspectives on religion, spirituality, irreligion, atheism and agnosticism and to provide the reader with pertinent information about these concepts.

Global Perspectives of Young Adults on Atheism and Irreligion

In a study entitled “Spontaneous Mystical Experiences, Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study among Atheist Young Adults” Van der Tempel(2018) revealed that young adult atheists may be at risk for mental health illness due to their involvement with spontaneous mystical experiences. Van der Temple carried out semi-structured interviews with eight adult participants who identified as atheists and the study revealed that the participants experienced feelings such as isolation, alienation, uncertainty, ruminator and worries about their mental health. Van der Tempel (6) These adults atheists also revealed the reasons for their atheism such as a lack of evidence, their internal logic and others expressed a strong secular or scientific mind-set . These atheists also expressed interest in the supernatural, alternative healing such as reiki

healing and feeling connected to persons, the cosmos and nature as well as believing in some kind of presence, power and purpose in the universe (Van der Tempel 9)

Furthermore, researchers Catto and Eccles (2013) conducted a study entitled “Disbelieving and Belonging: Investigating the Narratives of Young British Atheists” which addressed the gap in the presentation of data of British youth who identified as atheist. This study also explored the relationship between non-religion, secularity, atheism and the concept of belief among young people in Britain. Factors for lack of belief included religion not being discussed at home, conflicting religious views on abortion and the LGBTQIA community and the idea that religion is not needed to have a moral compass. Catto and Eccles (45) revealed that although these young atheists had emotional and intellectual beliefs, they also possessed stereotypical religious views such as Christians are homophobic. The study revealed that being an atheist in Britain required a conscious effort and choice and that many young atheists were simply creating their own beliefs using the help of the internet and interaction with other like minded individuals. (Catto and Eccles 56)

Similarly researchers Hemming and Madge (2017) discovered similar trends in their study entitled “Young British Religious “nones”: Findings from the Youth on religion study.” Hemming and Madge (888) concluded that young people who identify as non-religious were a diverse group and there were great differences in the labels they used. Additionally differences were seen in their religious beliefs as well as the factors influencing their religiosity and the continuities and discontinuities in their religious expression. As already evidenced in the study conducted by Catto and Eccles, this study also revealed that liberal individualism, agency and individualisation were factors in young people's conscious decisions about personal religiosity. Additionally, this study also highlighted the difference in beliefs and practices between young

people who were fervent atheists compared to those who had drifted from their religious belief yet still held certain religious perspectives. The non-religious person can be characterized by his fluidity and diversity as well the lack of a specific and automatic identity. (Hemming and Madge 874)

Similarly, Richardson challenged common myths about irreligious persons in his book “You Found Me, New Research on How Unchurched Nones, Millennials and Irreligious are Surprisingly Open to Christian Faith.” In a chapter entitled Exposing Common Church Myths, Richardson examines myths such as America is becoming a nation of nones and millennials are forsaking the church, never to return. This chapter concludes that millennials are leaving the church at a rate of forty-five percent which is lower than the expected rate. Additionally Richardson included atheists and agnostics in the category of nones which comprise sixteen percent of all Americans. This study found that nones were more spiritual, receptive and religious than expected. (Richardson 40)

Global Perspectives of Young Adults on Religion and Spirituality

Furthermore, Bullivant in his study entitled , “Europe’s Young Adults and Religion: Findings from the European Social Survey (2014-16) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops” revealed various religious trends among young adults. According to Bullivant, there is a high percentage of young adults who identify as “nones” in countries such as France, Sweden, Czech Republic, Estonia and the UK compared with a low percentage of “nones” in Israel, Poland and Lithuania. Additionally, the study found that a large percentage of Czech, Spanish, Dutch, Belgian and British young adults never attend religious services. (Bullivant 3) Moreover, young adults in Poland, Israel and Ireland were found to pray far more often than Norwegian, Danish,

Swedish and Czech young adults. Bullivant (9) also highlights that two thirds of young adults in France and Britain use the label of no religion as their religious identity. Bullivant postulates that although Lithuania can be considered one of the most religious countries in Europe because it has the second highest percentage of Catholic believers, it is also among the least religious countries given the very low frequency of church attendance and practise of praying by young adults.

Similarly Vincett et al.(2015) explored the religious and spiritual beliefs of young people in Europe in their study entitled, “ Young People and Religion and Spirituality in Europe: A Complex Picture.” They concluded, “ Young people in many European contexts take a different approach to religion: they are suspicious of the inconsistencies within and the social injustice committed by faith institutions, valorize self actualization of religious identity and belief.” (Vincett 9) This study further revealed that young adults, “ prioritize the acting out and embodiment of faith and belief in the everyday and in particular through close relationships.” (Vincett 9)

Similarly Christiansen (2018) in his article, “Most non religious Norwegians are members of the church of Norway” examines this contradicting trend of religious identity versus religious practices based on the thesis of Urstad (2018) entitled, “Non-religious Norwegians. Sociological analyses of individuals without a religion.” Urstad describes the non-religious group in Norway as unique with not many commonalities and goes on to further classify them as opposed, indifferent and interested. He also states that less than half of the population believe in God although many believe in higher powers such as angels. Additionally, he postulates that the high quality of life and welfare services in Norway is a reason for the decreasing relevance of religion and connection. Habib et al (2018) does not share this view point and states that religiosity and

religious well being was overall significantly and positively associated with life satisfaction as evidenced in their study , “ Religion and Life Satisfaction: A Correlational Study of Undergraduate Students in Trinidad.”

Similarly Valk et al. (2009) in their book entitled, “Teenagers’ Perspectives on the role of Religion in their Lives, Schools and Societies: A European Quantitative Study” explored the religious beliefs of teenagers in Norway, Estonia, Russia and Spain. In a chapter entitled, “Does Religion Matter to Young People in Norwegian School” by Skeie and Von der Lippe (269) , researchers examined the diverse religious beliefs of students in Norway , targeting schools in rural and large urban areas. The study revealed that half of the pupils considered religion as “absolutely not important” or “not important” whereas another large group viewed religion as neither important nor unimportant. Furthermore, those who did not believe in God comprised the largest group whereas a smaller group believed in some sort of life force or spirit. Similarly Vincett et al. (4) asked why for example the majority of young people claim to be religious and yet also claim religion is not important in their lives.

The chapter, “Options Besides and No religion Too –Perspectives of Estonian Youth” revealed that Estonian students who had personally encountered religious diversity are more tolerant and respectful to persons from different religious backgrounds. Furthermore, religious students were found to be more open to dialogue than non-religious students, and students who did not believe in god or any sort of spirit were least ready for dialogue. (Schihalejev 118) Additionally. students who were exposed to religious diversity were more open to have religious dialogue and those who experienced religious diversity among friends were most open to dialogue followed by those who had religious diversity in their family or school.(Schihalejev 119)

Local Studies on Religion and Young Adults in Trinidad

Studies have been carried out in Trinidad and Tobago, which explore the relationship between religion and delinquency as well as the relationship between religion and suicide among adolescents and young adults. Toussaint et al. (2015) conducted an investigation exploring religiousness and suicide in a nationally representative sample of Trinidad and Tobago adolescents and adults. The study utilized a two-stage cluster sample design which targeted forty-two schools to participate in a random selection survey. The results of Toussaint et al. (1447) revealed that Catholics and Seven Day Adventists were less likely to think about suicide compared to nonreligious participants. Furthermore, higher self-rated religiosity, attendance of religious services and more frequent prayer were factors that were linked to a lower likelihood of planned suicide. Thus, Toussaint et al (1441) this study concluded that religiousness might be beneficial to young adults and teenagers by lowering their likelihood to suicidal behaviours.

On the other hand Mustapha (2013) conducted a study entitled ‘‘Religion and Delinquency in Trinidad and Tobago’’ where he examined the relationship between religiosity, spirituality and delinquency among secondary school students. Mustapha(141) clearly defined the differences between religion and spirituality and described religious engagement as religious attendance, frequency of reading a religious text, frequency of prayer and parental religiosity. The results of this study revealed that students with higher levels of religiosity and religious beliefs were less likely to engage in delinquent behaviours. Additionally, schools with a higher level of religiosity in their culture and climate experienced lower levels of delinquency. (Mustapha 143)

Thus it can be concluded that various global studies indicate a rise in a lack of religious beliefs among young adults due to various factors and circumstances. Religion no longer plays an important role in lives of young people although they may identify with a certain religious label.. Furthermore the non religious beliefs and spirituality of young adults can be described as diverse, unique and fluid as these young nones are creating their own beliefs and ideas on religion according to their own personal experiences. However there are not any local studies examining atheism and lack of religious beliefs among young adults in Trinidad although literature has been published examining the relationship between religion and mental health and religion and delinquency in Trinidad. Thus this study will seek to fill the gap in literature regarding the exploration of the spiritual and religious beliefs of young people in Trinidad as well as determine whether atheism and irreligion are really on the rise in Trinidad among young adults.

The following chapter will present the findings from the questionnaires and two interviews which were conducted with students at the University of the West Indies, St Augustine Campus .

CHAPTER TWO

Presentation of Data

This chapter will present the results of the questionnaires and interviews which were based on the research questions. The questionnaire was distributed among 25 participants comprising 15 female participants and 10 male participants. Interviews were conducted with two persons who were not participants in the questionnaire. The findings were presented using pie charts as well as in text form and include quotations from the Interviewees and were divided into categories based on similar topic sections in the questionnaire.

Religion in the Personal Life of Young Adults

From the questionnaires and interviews, the data reflects that religion in general is important in the lives of young adults. For example , Fig 1 below shows that 19 out of 25 people agreed with this statement whereas the minority did not agree with this statement.. Similarly Interviewee 2 also expands on this by stating , “I consider myself a believer, although not a particularly religious person, I do believe in God .” and lives her life based on values and morals that were instilled in her while growing up.

25 responses

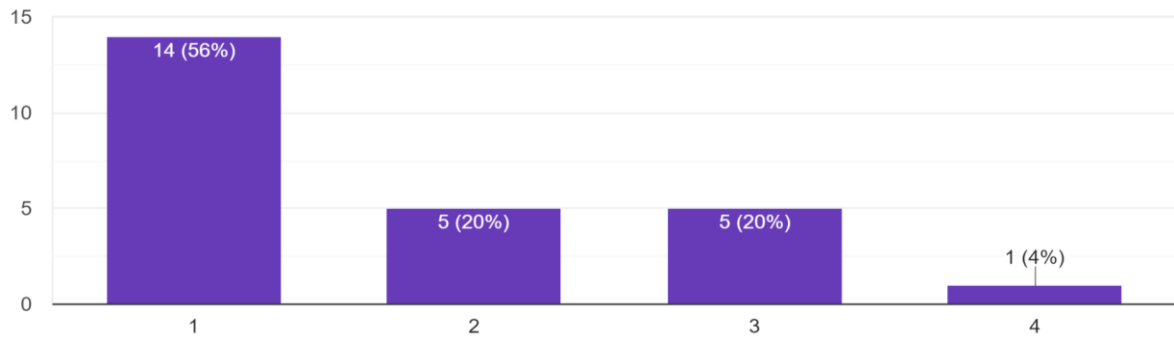


Fig 1. Bar graph illustrating the different levels of the Importance of Religion in the lives of young adults.

Although religious activities is not something that young adults get involved in frequently given that only six participants stated they often participated in religious activities. Half of the participants (56%) indicated that they sometimes participated in religious activities. For example Interviewee 1 remarked, ‘I believe in a higher power, in an entity, I pray every night’ On the other hand, Interviewee 2 revealed, “Praying and tithing are important to me, I have seen a difference in my life since I started tithing.” However, she revealed that she does not read her spiritual text often or attend church.

25 responses

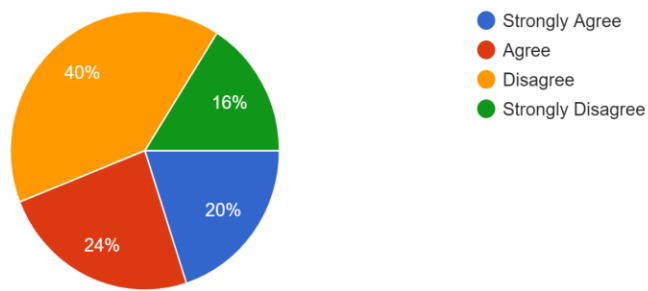


Fig 2. Pie Chart depicting the percentage of young adults who stated peer pressure during their teenage years affected their religious beliefs.

Although religion is an important part in young adult lives as stated above, nearly half of the participants (44%) seen in Fig 2 above ,stated they started feeling peer pressure during teenage years which affected their religious beliefs. As stated above religion is an important part of young adults' lives and they sometimes discuss it with friends and family. Interviewee 1 said , “I am comfortable talking about religion with friends from a spiritual or critical sense, but not family members who are very religious and try and force their beliefs on me.” Interviewee 2 adds, ‘Many young people do not discuss religion it is not a normal or common topic of conversation.’”

Regarding the rise of atheism among young adults in Trinidad, the majority of participants stated that they observed this phenomenon occurring based on their experiences with friends and family Interviewee 2 does not agree with this statement saying, “I have friend who is Buddhist but does not believe in God.”

Interviewee 1 stated, “I have many friends who are not religious, they are more spiritual and they tend to question religion like me.”

Knowledge of religious concepts and terminology among Young Adults

25 responses

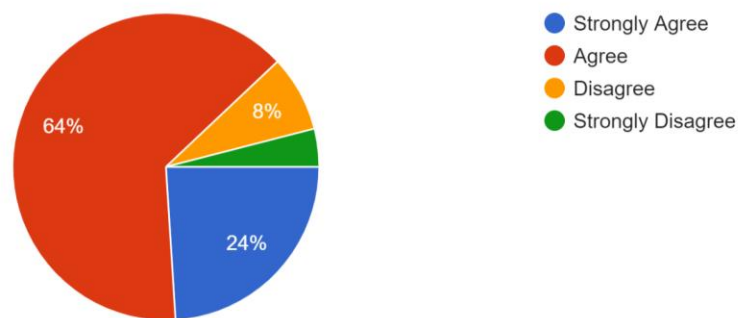


Fig 3. Pie chart illustrating the percentage of young adults who agree that religion and spirituality are two different things.

The data collected reflects that the majority of young adults are knowledgeable and aware of various religious concepts and terminology. For example, 22 participants (88%) agreed that religion and spirituality are two different things whereas the minority of participants disagreed with this statement. Fig 3 above reflects these results and similarly Interviewee 1 remarked “I view religion as being very rigid, one has to follow specific codes whereas spirituality is always changing and is more about a connection with God in a general sense.” Although Interviewee 2 shared a similar view point, she also expands by saying, “I believe that religion and spirituality go hand in hand and that there is spirituality in religion.”

However regarding the importance of spirituality in today's society, the majority of participants (84%), revealed that they believed spirituality played a more important role than religion in today's society as seen in Fig.4 below. However Interviewee 1 disagreed with this opinion and stated, ‘‘I believe that religion is still playing a big role in today’s society , in terms of legislation in some countries such as Sharia law in some countries and Christian legislations being enforced in the US which is against the constitution .’’

On the contrary, Interviewee 2 remarked, ‘‘Religion is no longer important because people are doing as they please and they do not consider that every action has a reaction.’’

25 responses

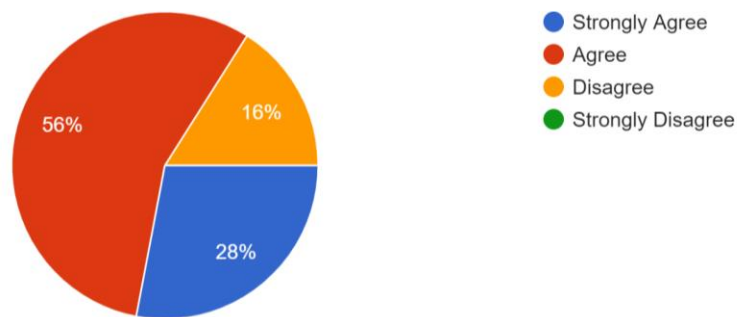


Fig 4. Pie Chart illustrating the percentage of young adults who agree that spirituality is more important in today’s society than religion.

Similarly, the majority of participants, 18 participants exactly also agreed that atheism and irreligion were two different things and the majority of participants (72 %) revealed that they were familiar with the terms atheism, agnosticism and irreligion.

Role of Religion in the Economy, History, Happiness, Education and Society

As seen in the previous questions above, the majority of the participants believed that spirituality plays a more important role than religion nowadays. However, regarding the statement that wealth has become the new religion, nearly half of the participants disagreed with this statement whereas 14 participants agreed with this statement. Interviewee 2 echoed similar opinions, by saying, “ Many people idolize wealth and money and that is their sole purpose for living.” Interviewee 2 further expands and explains, “ I can decide not to attend church in favour for working for a quadruple salary instead of getting closer to God.”

The topic of wealth and religion can also be closely linked to the role of religious institutions who profited financially because of colonialism and slavery. The majority of participants in the questionnaire agreed that they were aware of the role of religious institutions in the process of colonialism and slavery with only seven participants lacking awareness as seen in Fig. 5 below. Interviewee 2 disagreed with the abolishment of these religious institutions despite no longer attending church , “ The church is a comfort and safe space for many people and mental health cases may begin to rise if these religious institutions are abolished .”

25 responses

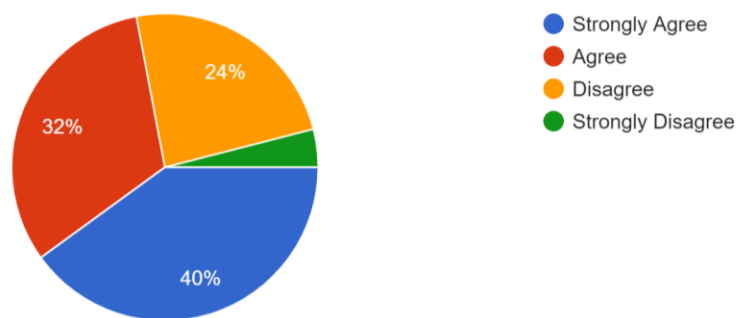


Fig 5. Pie Chart illustrating the percentage of young adults who are aware of the role of religious institutions in the process of colonialism and slavery.

Similarly, the majority(88%) o participants disagreed with the statement that religion provides false hope and has no role in modern society . Moreover, Interviewee 1 expands “I believe religion offers redemption as throughout history there has always been human suffering, people used religion as a way to cope with their existence in the world.”

Although Interviewee 2 mentioned above that churches provide a source of hope for many personas, there is also the belief that religion is a series of man made rules that inhibit human desire and happiness. The results from the question indicate that the opinion on this statement remained almost evenly split, 12 participants agreed versus 13 who disagreed, However the majority of participants disagreed that a lack religious belief encourages individual freedom and happiness as seen in Fig 6 with only 8 participants agreeing with this statement.

25 responses

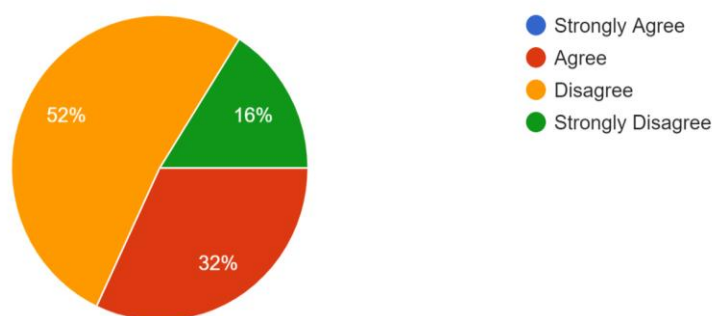


Fig 6. Pie Chart indicating the percentage of young adults who agree that a lack of religious belief encourages individual freedom and happiness.

Furthermore, the majority of participants (80%) revealed that they agreed with certain religious scholars that a world without religion would bring about chaos and crime as seen in Fig 7 below. However Interviewee 1 does not share similar feelings, saying, ‘‘if we take the core beliefs of preserving the environment and humans, we will not have chaos because some religious persons do not care about the environment and caused genocide.’’

25 responses

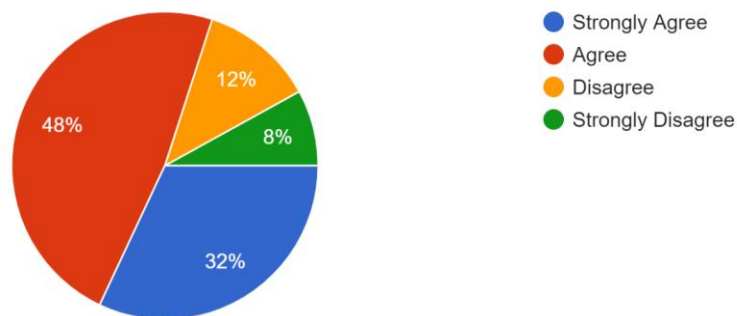


Fig 7. Pie Chart indicating the percentage of young people who agree that a world without religion will bring about chaos and crime.

Furthermore, 56% of participants agreed that attending denominational school affected their religious beliefs. Interviewee 2 remarked, ‘‘I observed that students who attended schools with a religious background tend to be more well balanced individuals.’’ Similarly 21 participants disagreed with the statement that all schools in Trinidad should be made non-denominational as seen in Fig 8. below.

25 responses

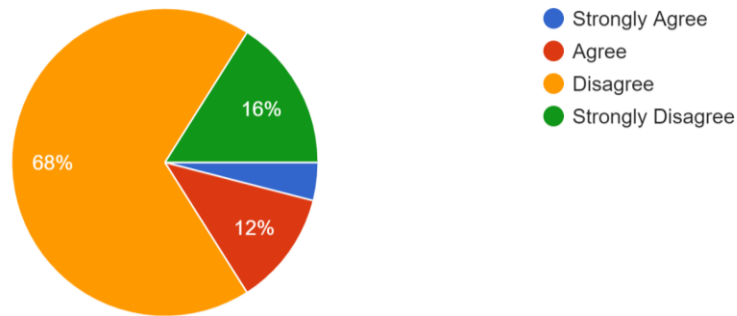


Fig 8. Pie Chart depicting the percentage of young adults who agree that all schools in Trinidad should be made non denominational.

Interviewee 1 shared a similar point of view, “ I believe a Christian student attending a Hindu school will learn to be more tolerant and respectful of Hinduism.” This statement highlights religious plurality in Trinidad’s society and the majority of participants, 18 participants, agreed that Trinidad would still be considered a religiously plural society in the future

In the following Chapter, Chapter 3, these findings will be discussed in light of previous studies that were presented in Chapter 1.

CHAPTER THREE

DISCUSSION

Importance of Religion in Personal Life of Young Adults

This study revealed that the majority of participants considered religion as an important part of their life. However, the majority of participants did not often participate in religious activities, instead they sometimes participated in religious activities and sometimes discussed the topic of religion with friends and family. However, the first interviewee remarked that religion was not an important role in her life but she believed in a higher power. This contrasts with the point of view of Skeie and Von der Lippe (269) who revealed that half of the pupils considered religion as “absolutely not important” or “not important” those who did not believe in God comprised the largest group.

As stated above, the majority of participants stated that they sometimes participated in religious activities. However Mustapha (141) and Bullivant (10) link religiosity with religious engagement such as prayer, church attendance and reading of spiritual texts. However, Interviewee 2 disagrees with them by highlighting that although she no longer attends church nor reads her spiritual text often, she considers herself to be a religious person. Furthermore, this interviewee commented on the importance of tithing in her life whereas Bullivant did not include the concept of tithing in his study. Thus, these contrasting views reveal that religious identity and frequency of religious activities do not go hand in hand always.

Religion in School, Denominational Schools vs Non Denominational Schools

Although the majority of the participants did not agree that attending a denominational school had an influence on their religious beliefs, the majority of participants disagreed with the question that all schools in Trinidad should be made non denominational schools. These results indicate that many young adults believe in the importance of having religion in schools and Interviewee One agrees that students who attended denominational schools would learn to be more tolerant and respectful to other religions such as a Christian student attending a Hindu school. She also revealed that if she had to choose a religion in the future, she would choose Hinduism because she attended a Hindu primary school as well as a Hindu secondary school and always felt most connected to that religion. This point of view is affirmed by Schihalejev (119) who stated that students exposed to religious diversity were more respectful and tolerant of people of different religious backgrounds and were most open to religious dialogue. Thus denominational schools have an important role in fostering religious tolerance once they do not force religious beliefs on students.

Similarly, Interviewee 2 observed that denominational schools produced more well balanced individuals and Mustapha (143) affirms that denominational schools were found to have higher levels of religiosity and lower levels of delinquency and those students with higher levels of religiosity were less likely to engage in delinquency. Furthermore, although nearly half of the participants in the questionnaire revealed that peer pressure during their teenage years affected their religious beliefs the majority still consider religion to be important in their life as well as in schools.

Religion and Morals, Mental Health, Happiness

This study revealed that young adults in Trinidadians perceive morals to be attached to religion for example the questionnaire revealed that the majority of participants agreed with the statement that a world without religion will bring about chaos and crime. However, Interviewee 1 disagreed with this point and highlighted the fact that religious persons committed genocide and did not care about the environment and this contradicts that general belief that morals are attached to religion. Mustapha(143) does not share her point of view and hypothesized that students with higher levels of religiosity and religious beliefs were less likely to engage in delinquent behaviours.

This study revealed that a large majority of young adults disagreed with the question that a lack of religious beliefs encourages personal happiness and freedom. It is interesting to observe that although more young adults agreed with the previous question that religion is a series of manmade rules that inhibit human desire and happiness, many participants did not automatically agree that lack of religious belief is the key to gain freedom and personal happiness.

Furthermore, Interviewee 2 agreed with Toussaint (1447) who concluded that students who were more religious were less likely to have suicidal thought and tendencies. Interviewee 2 explained that churches and religious institutions should not be abolished because they provide a safe space for persons and help persons with their mental health. Van der Tempel (6) supported this theory and found that young adult atheists who experimented with spontaneous mystical experiences were prone to anxiety, alienation, worry and mental health concerns.

Regarding the rise of atheism among young adults in Trinidad, the majority of participants agreed that atheism is on the rise. However, the first interviewee revealed that although they have many friends who also are irreligious, they do not identify as atheists. Interviewee 2 also added that she had a friend who did not believe in God but was a Buddhist and a deeply religious person. Therefore although the majority of participants were aware of the differences between atheism and irreligion, it is very difficult to determine the true religious beliefs of a person and this is affirmed by Hemmings and Madge (874) the non-religious person can be characterized by his fluidity and diversity as well the lack of a specific and automatic identity. Similarly Vincett et al. (4) question why the majority of young people claim to be religious and yet also claim religion is not important in their lives.

Knowledge of Religious Terminology and Concepts of Religious Belief.

This study revealed that the majority of young adults are aware of different religious terminology and concepts although they do not often discuss religion with friends or family members nor do they often participate in religious activities.. For example, the majority of participants in the questionnaire agreed that religion and spirituality are two different things and the persons interviewed also supported these results. The first interviewee defined religion as rigid and a series of rules whereas spirituality is always evolving and affects one's personal relationship with God. Additionally, the majority of participants in the questionnaire acknowledged that they were familiar with the terms atheism, agnosticism and irreligion and the majority of participants also agreed with the statement that atheism and irreligion were two different things.

Furthermore, as stated above, the majority of young adults viewed religion and spirituality as different things; however, the majority of young adults in this study agreed that spirituality is playing a more important role than religion in today's society. However Interviewee One does not agree with this general consensus and instead believes that religion is more important than ever in today's society because of religious laws such as Shariah law and Christian Legislation. However, Interviewee 2 does not share this view point, instead she believes that religion is no longer important as persons are doing as they please without fear of consequences for their actions. Hemming and Madge (2017) revealed that liberal individualism, agency and individualisation were factors in young people's conscious decisions about personal religiosity.

Although Interviewee 1 did not identify as an atheist it is clear that she is creating her own spiritual beliefs as she progresses, incorporating beliefs from Buddhism and Hinduism. Similarly, the studies of Catto and Eccles (2013) and Hemming and Madge (2017) reveal similar trends with Catto and Eccles stating that young atheists are creating their own beliefs as they go along with the help of the internet and other like minded individuals.

This religious dilemma aligns with the point of view of Urstad (2018) who revealed in his study that although less than half of the population in Norway believe in God, many persons believe in higher powers such as angels. Similarly Van der Tempel (2019) mentioned that young adult atheists were interested in reiki healing, nature, persons and cosmos, supernatural occurrences as well as finding purpose in the universe. Richardson (2019) alludes to this spiritual search by remarking that nones were more spiritual, receptive and religious than expected.

Additionally, Interviewee Two stated that she tried to be transparent and truthful in all her daily activities and this is one way she interprets her religious beliefs. Vincett et al (9) affirms this point of view by stating that young adults, “ prioritize the acting out and embodiment of faith and belief in the everyday and in particular through close relationships.”

The History and Future of Religion.

This study indicated that the majority of participants were aware of the role of religious institutions in the processes of slavery and colonialism. Vincett (9) supports this view point “ Young people in many European contexts take a different approach to religion: they are suspicious of the inconsistencies within and the social injustice committed by faith institutions, valorize self actualization of religious identity and belief.” However, the majority of individuals in this study did not agree that wealth has become the new religion in today's society. Interviewee 2 disagrees and reveals many persons idolize wealth and it becomes their sole goal in life, choosing material wealth over establishing a relationship with God. Urstad's study highlighted the link between wealth and irreligion by stating that the high standard of living in Norway had led to persons decreasing religious beliefs. Lastly the majority of participants agreed that Trinidad will continue being a religious plural society in the future Interviewee 1 supported this by saying that religion offers hope and redemption throughout history to help with human suffering and will continue to have a role in society,

CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to answer the two research questions. These goal of these questions were to discover the perceptions of young people toward religion and spirituality in Trinidad and to determine if the phenomenon of irreligion an existing or growing phenomenon in Trinidad. Results were gained from the primary data and this chapter will synthesis all the findings of the study.

The study found that the majority of young adults consider religion as an important part of their life. Furthermore it showed that many young adults sometimes discuss religion with their friends and family and they also sometimes participate in religious activities. Additionally, the study found that many young adults revealed that they faced peer pressure during their teenage young which affected their religious beliefs. This research found that the majority of participants agreed that atheism is on the rise among young adults in Trinidad based on their experience with friends and family. Moreover, this study indicated that the majority of young adults are aware of various religious terminology and concepts such as atheism, irreligion and agnosticism. Similarly many young adults agreed that there were differences among religious terms such as irreligion and atheism as well as spirituality and religion. This study also showed that young adults did not link a lack of religious belief to happiness and freedom and they agreed that a world without religion would bring about chaos and crime. Although many participants agreed that spirituality plays a more important role than religion nowadays, they disagreed with the statement that religion has no role in modern society and provides false hope.

Additionally, this research indicated that many participants were aware of the role that religious institutions played in colonialism and slavery yet they disagreed with the statement that all

schools should be made non-denominational in Trinidad. Furthermore half of the participants did not agree that wealth had become the new religion and the majority of participants agreed that Trinidad would still be religiously plural society in the future. Thus young adults in Trinidad cannot be classified as atheists or irreligious persons instead they are very aware of religious terms and events and have their own beliefs on religion although they may not be the most active in their religious institutions. Thus, young adults in Trinidad are not disconnected or uninterested in religion and spirituality.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Further studies can be conducted to investigate the different religious beliefs of male and female young adults in Trinidad. Additionally, studies can be conducted to determine the role that religion plays in the mental health of young adults at tertiary education. Moreover, studies can be conducted in different Caribbean islands that are not religiously plural to determine if having one main religion instead of multiple religions has an effect on the levels of atheism among young adults.

WORKS CITED

- Bullivant, Stephen. *Europe's Young Adults and Religion. Findings from the European Social Survey (2014-2016) to inform the 2018 Synod of Bishops*. Benedict XVI Centre for Religion and Society, Institut Catholique de Paris, 2018.
- Catto, Rebecca and Janet Eccles. “(Dis)believing and Belonging: Investigating the Narratives of Young British Atheists.” *Temenos- Nordic Journal of Comparative Religion*, vol 49, no.1, Sept 2013, pp 37-63.
- Cristiansen, Atle. “Most non-religious Norwegians are members of the Church of Norway.” *University of Agder* 22 Aug, 2018.
- Habib, Diane et al. “Religion and Life Satisfaction a Correlational Study of Undergraduate Students in Trinidad.” *Journal of Health and Religion*, 2018, pp 1567-1580.
- Hemming, Peter and Nicola Madge. “Young British religious nones: findings from the youth on religion study.” *Journal of Youth Studies*, vol 20, 2016, pp 872-888.
- Mustapha, Nasser. “Religion and Delinquency in Trinidad and Tobago.” *International Journal Social Sciences and Education*, vol 4, 2013, pp 135-144.
- “Nones on the Rise.” *Pew Research Centre*, 9 October 2012.
- REDCo. “Teenagers Perspectives on the Role of Religion in their Lives, Schools and Societies. A European Quantitative Study.” edited by Pile Valk et al., Waxmann Verlag, 2009.

Richardson, Rick. *You Found Me: New Research on how unchurched nones, Millennials and Irreligious are surprisingly open to the Christian Faith*. InterVarsity Press, 2019.

Stastna, Kazi, “Do countries lose religion as they gain wealth.” *CBC NEWS*, 12 March 2013.

Steinfels, Peter. “Scandinavian Non Believers, Which is not to say Atheists.” *The New York Times*, 27 Feb. 2009.

Toussaint, Loren. et al. “Religiousness and suicide in a nationally representative sample of Trinidad and Tobago adolescents and young adults.” *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 2015, pp 1441-1450.

Van der Tempel, Jan. *Spontaneous Mystical Experiences , Mental Health and Wellbeing: A Qualitative Study among Atheist Young Adults*. 2018. University of Toronto, Masters dissertation. *Proquest Dissertations and Theses*.

Vincett, Giselle et al. “Young People and Religion and Spirituality in Europe: A Complex Picture.” *Handbook of Children and Youth Studies*, 2015, pp 889-902.

APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

1. Are you comfortable discussing the topic of religion with other people?
2. Do you consider yourself a “believer”?
3. Is religion an active part of your life? Can you give more details?

What religion do you practice? Is it the same religion that your family practices?

4. What are your thoughts on religion and spirituality? Do you see them as two different things?
Can you give your point of view regarding each of the two terms?

5. Do you think that in today’s society, religion still plays an important role or is it becoming obsolete?

6. How do you think that religion has played an important role in the lives of human beings from the beginning of time?

7. Do you think that religion can impact the economy of a country? or of a person? how?

8. Do you feel that religion is becoming a taboo topic due to the various controversies regarding the history of religion in the world such as the use of religion in the process of colonialization and slavery?

9. What do you think about denominational schools in Trinidad?

10. Should there be a separation of church and state in our country regarding the education system?

11. Do you believe that more schools in our country should be non-denominational instead of denominational? Should there be a separation of church and state in our country regarding the education system?

12. What do you think is young people's perception about religion? Do your peers talk about it?

13. Do you think that people can still believe in God although they do not attend any specific religious institution?

14. Are religious institutions necessary in today's society?

. Evolution is necessary for humanity yet religions have more or less remained the same. Has the time come for the creation of new religions to replace the traditional religions?

15. Religious scholars believe a future without religion will bring about chaos and confusion. Do you agree with their predictions?

16. Poorer countries still have firm religious beliefs whereas religion no longer plays a role in wealthier countries. Therefore, has wealth become the new religion for human beings?

17. From your perspective, do you think a world without religion will lead to positive or negative effects for the society?

APPENDIX B

Questionnaire

1) Is religion an important part of your life?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

2) Do you actively participate in religious activities?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

3) Did you begin questioning your religious beliefs during your teenage years due to peer pressure from friends?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

4) How often do you discuss the topic of religion with friends or family members?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Often

5) Do you think that there is a rise in atheism among youth from your personal experience with friends or family members?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

-

6) Do you believe that religion and spirituality are two different things?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

7) Are the terms atheism, agnosticism, irreligion common terms to you?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

8) Do you believe that atheism and irreligion are different things?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

b

9) Do you think that spirituality is more important than religion in today's society?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

10) Do you think that wealth has become a religion given that wealthier countries have higher rates of atheism than poorer countries?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

11) Are you aware of the role of religious institutions in the process of colonialism and slavery?

Very Unaware

Unaware

Aware

Very Aware

b

12) Do you believe that religion is a series of man made rules and philosophies that inhibit human desires and happiness?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

13) Do you think that a lack of religious belief encourages individual freedom and happiness?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

14) Did going to a denominational school influence your views on religion?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

b

Strongly Agree

15) Do you think that all schools in Trinidad should be non denominational?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

16) Do you think that religion provides false hope and therefore has no role in society?

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

17) Do you agree with certain religious scholars that a world without religion will bring about chaos, confusion and crime?

b

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree

18) Do you believe that Trinidad will still be considered a religiously plural society in the future?.

Strongly Disagree

Disagree

Agree

Strongly Agree