

Sense of coherence and perception of the transcendent as contributors of Catholic priests' life satisfaction

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Background: Aaron Antonovsky's salutogenetic model has become one of the most important conceptual frameworks in health sciences in recent decades. Less is known about Catholic priests whose global life orientation is their religious faith. We thus intended to analyze the influence of SOC, transcendence perception as a measure of (affective) spirituality, spiritual dryness as a phase of a spiritual crisis on their life satisfaction, and social support.

Methods: This study is part of the German Pastoral Ministry Study, an anonymous survey among using standardized questionnaires (i.e., SOC-13, DSES-6, SDS, FSozU, SWLS). For this analysis we relied on data of 4,157 priests with a predominantly age range from 45 to 85 years.

Results: The SOC correlated positively with life satisfaction (SWLS, $r=.49$), transcendence perception (DSES, $r=.33$), and social support (FSozU, $r=.30$), and negatively with spiritual dryness (SDS, $r=-.49$). SOC explains only 14% of DSES's variance, and DSES 14% of SOC's variance. Stepwise regression analyses indicated that priests' life satisfaction was predicted best by SOC (Beta = .37, $T=23.1$, $p<.0001$) explaining 28% of variance. Transcendence perception (Beta = .29, $T=17.9$, $p<.0001$) would add further 9% of explained variance, while social support (Beta = .09; $T=6.6$; $p<.0001$) and spiritual dryness (Beta = -.04, $T=-2.4$, $p=.018$) would add both < 1% of further variance explanation, and are thus of minor relevance.

Conclusions: For Catholic priests having a meaningful life and perceiving the sacred in their life are relevant sources contributing to their life satisfaction, while social support was of minor relevance.