

American women are happier going to church than shopping on Sundays: study

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A new study conducted by a Ben-Gurion University of the Negev (BGU) researcher, together with a researcher from De-Paul University, reveals that women in the United States generally derive more happiness from religious participation than from shopping on Sundays.

Additionally, the repeal of "blue laws," which allow stores to open on Sundays, has a negative effect on the level of religious participation of [white women](#) and therefore has a negative impact on their [happiness](#). Interestingly, the authors did not observe any significant decline in reported happiness of other groups whose religious participation was not significantly affected by repeal.

The research also reveals that when Sunday blue laws are repealed, women who choose secular activities, such as shopping, are not happier. The repeal of blue laws decreases the relative probability of being at least "pretty happy" relative to "not happy" by about 17 percent.

According to Dr. Danny Cohen-Zada of BGU's Department of Economics, "We found that there is direct evidence that religious participation has a positive causal effect on a person's happiness. Furthermore, an important part of the decline in women's happiness during the last three decades can be explained by decline in religious participation."

The authors speculate that respondents did not return to attending church as much even after they noticed that they were happier before the repeal

because of a problem of self-control or the need for immediate satisfaction.

"People choose shopping, like [watching TV](#), because it provides immediate satisfaction," Dr. Cohen-Zada explains. "That satisfaction lasts for the moment it's being consumed and not much longer than that. Religious participation, on the other hand, is not immediate. Instead, it requires persistence over a period of time."

The researchers analyzed data from the General Social Survey (GSS). They selected respondents who either live in states where there was a distinct, clear and significant change (repeal) in the prohibition of retail activity on Sundays (10 states) or where there was no change at all (six states).

Within the states, they used data for Catholics and Protestants because they were the most likely to attend church on Sundays. Non-Christian religions and respondents with no religion were excluded.

The measure of religious participation is based upon a question in the GSS on church attendance. Respondents were given nine possible responses to a question on their frequency of attending religious services, ranging from never to several times a week.

Provided by American Associates, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev

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