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Cognitive and emotional characteristics of New Religious Movement members:

New questions and data on the mental health issue

Coralie Buxant, Vassilis Saroglou, Stefania Casalfiore, and Louis-Léon Christians

Université catholique de Louvain, Centre for Psychology of Religion

Abstract

The common assumption that members of so-called “cults” and New Religious Movements (NRMs) have mental health problems is usually countered by empirical research suggesting a normal personality profile. Going further than the normality-pathology distinction, we investigated affective-relational (parental and adult attachment) and cognitive (need for closure) needs, world assumptions, and past and present depression as reported by members ($N = 113$) of a variety of NRMs in Belgium that are somewhat socially contested.

Comparisons were made with data from the general population. Results suggest a fragile past (insecure attachment history, high need for closure, and depressive tendencies) but a positive present (positive world assumptions, security in adult attachment, no depression) and an optimistic future, at least on the basis of self-perceptions. Overall, the pattern of results fit well with what we know from psychology of conversion in general.