

Awe/Gratitude and Self-Acceptance as best predictors of wellbeing in people from the LGBTQI+ community who have experienced acceptance and discrimination within their church

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Background

People who identify as part of the LGBTQI+ community may experience both acceptance and discrimination within their church (Büssing et al., 2024).

Their negative experiences can affect their relationship with God in terms of spiritual dryness and loss of faith, and their psychological wellbeing.

Aims

What are the predictors of **psychological wellbeing** as the dependent variable?

Independent influences were assumed for

1. satisfaction with friends or with the local church community,
2. perception of discrimination within the church,
3. spiritual dryness and religious trust,
4. awe and gratitude,
5. meaning in life,
6. self-acceptance (search and presence),
7. sociodemographic variables such as gender identity, age, and living within a stable partnership.

Methods

Cross-sectional survey between November 24, 2022, and January 26, 2023, with standardized questionnaires among 417 people who identify themselves as part of the LGBTQI+ community.

The study was positively evaluated by the IRB of the Witten/Herdecke University (#264/2022).

Results

Description of Participants

- N=417; mean age: 43 ± 16 years
- Gender identity: 45% female, 46% male, 6% genderqueer/non-binary, 3% trans*
- Sexual orientation: 59% homosexual, 17% bi/pansexual, 19% heterosexual, 5% "other"
- Denomination: 37% Catholic, 26% Protestant, 15% Free-church, 13% Seventh-day Adventists, 1% other, 9% none

Support Satisfaction

Most feel accepted (85%) and supported (79%) by their direct friends as LGBTQI+. In contrast, only 28% are satisfied with the acceptance as LGBTQI+ by their local religious community, and 31% are satisfied with their local religious community's support.

Discrimination and Loss of Faith

53% see themselves discriminated against by representatives of the church/religious communities because of their gender identity/sexual orientation. About 14% stated that they had left the church because of their negative experiences with representatives of churches or religious communities, 11% said that they had lost their faith because of these experiences (Büssing et al., 2024).

Predictors of wellbeing (stepwise regression model)

- Stepwise regression analyses found eight significant predictors of psychological wellbeing (WHO-5) that would explain 39% of the variance (Table 1).
- Meaning in Life (MLQ) alone would explain 19% of the variance, followed by Awe/Gratitude (GrAw-7; +8%) and Self-acceptance (+5%).
- Spiritual Dryness (SDS-6) and Religious Trust were further negative predictors, while male gender identity, living within a stable partnership, and Satisfaction with acceptance/ support by Friends (BMLSS-Support) were positive predictors, which would together explain only 5% of the additional variance.
- Searching for Meaning in Life (MLQ), Satisfaction with Church Community support (BMLSS-Support), Perception of Discrimination, and age were not significant in this model.

Figure 1: Primary source of presented data

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ORIGINAL PAPER

Perception of Acceptance and Discrimination Among the LGBTQI+ Community in their Churches and Its Association with Spiritual Dryness: Findings from a Cross-Sectional Study in Germany

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Table 1: Predictors of wellbeing as dependent variable (stepwise regression analyses)

Dependent variable: Wellbeing (WHO-5) Model 8: F = 22.5, p < 0.001; R ² = .39	Beta	T	p
(constant)		1.340	.181
Meaning in Life: Presence (MLQ)	.142	2.526	.012
Awe/Gratitude (GrAw-7)	.243	4.585	<.001
Self-Acceptance	.218	4.005	<.001
Spiritual Dryness (SDS-6)	-.163	-2.792	.006
Satisfaction with Acceptance/Support by Friends (BMLSS-Support)	.112	2.244	.026
Living in a stable partnership	.108	2.216	.028
Male gender	.106	2.243	.026
Trust as a s strong hold (A37)	-.111	-2.102	.036

- "According to the **minority stress concept** of Meyer (2003), the objective distal stressors (i.e., objective situations and conditions) can be independent of personal identifications, while the proximal stress processes refer to subjective perceptions and their interpretations.
- The fact that self-acceptance was a relevant buffer of spiritual dryness, and both were the best predictors of wellbeing, is an important finding. This means that it is not gender identity or sexual orientation per se that has an impact on wellbeing. The perception of discrimination and exclusion is nevertheless associated with lower well-being, but it is not a significant predictor.
- **Self-acceptance and spiritual dryness are of greater importance and override the effect of the perception of discrimination.**" (Büssing et al., 2024)

Conclusions

- Even though several have **experienced discrimination** in their churches, most seem to have **found ways to cope with it**.
- While this negative experience did not affect their psychological wellbeing, it nevertheless can trigger or aggravate phases of spiritual dryness which can finally result in loss of faith.
- The best predictors of their wellbeing were intrinsic abilities/attitudes such as Awe/Gratitude, an indicator of an experiential aspect of non-religious spirituality, and Self-acceptance.
- Nevertheless, 96% want a church/religious community that is appreciative and accepting of all people - and accepts them as they are and feel, and 93% are sure that God loves and accepts them as they are.