

RESEARCH ON THE ATTITUDES OF YOUTH TOWARD RELIGION, ETHICS, AND EVERYDAY CHALLENGES

Olivera Trajkovska ¹

Ognen Kocovski ²

Abstract: *This paper presents the findings of an original sociological survey conducted among 193 young respondents from five educational institutions in Skopje, North Macedonia, examining the relationship between religion, ethics, and everyday challenges. The study was implemented across secondary and higher education institutions, including Orthodox and Islamic theological schools as well as the Faculty of Philosophy. It aimed to capture how young people perceive religiosity, ethics, and moral values in the context of their daily lives and psychosocial difficulties. Results demonstrate that 81% of respondents believe ethics in religion significantly influence their daily behavior, with the dominant understanding of religiosity grounded not in ritual, but in applied moral values and belief in God. Statistical analysis reveals strong positive correlations between religiosity and coping mechanisms: those who consider themselves more religious report that faith helps them to overcome stress, anxiety, and ethical dilemmas. Conversely, a strong negative correlation ($r \approx -0.98$) was observed between age and psychosocial problems, showing acute vulnerability among adolescents aged 15–18. Furthermore, a notable majority support the introduction of ethics and religion into formal education, arguing that religious knowledge enhances coexistence and tolerance in a multicultural society. The findings highlight the dual role of religion as both a personal resource for resilience and a communal mechanism for fostering interethnic and interfaith harmony. This research contributes to broader debates on the role of religion in education, ethics, and youth well-being, positioning North Macedonia as a case study of a multiethnic, multiconfessional society grappling with contemporary global challenges.*

Keywords: youth, religiosity, ethics, education, multiculturalism.

¹ Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups, North Macedonia, email: direktor@kovz.gov.mk

² Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups, North Macedonia, email: ognen.kocovski@kovz.gov.mk

1. Introduction

Religion and ethics have historically served as key frameworks through which societies articulate values, address crises, and construct community life. In the era of globalization, young people increasingly confront complex psychosocial challenges that test traditional structures of meaning. North Macedonia, with its mosaic of ethnic and religious communities, provides an especially instructive context for investigating how religion influences youth well-being and ethical orientations.

This paper presents findings from a survey conducted among secondary and university students in Skopje in 2024–2025. The research forms part of the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups' broader interest in understanding the values and needs of younger generations. The study sought to answer three questions:

1. What is the meaning of religiosity for young people in North Macedonia?
2. How do religion and ethics contribute to coping with everyday challenges?
3. What role should ethics and religion play in formal education?

By situating the results within comparative scholarship on religion, globalization, and youth studies (Robertson, 1992; Küng, 1991; Davie, 2015), the paper demonstrates that religiosity continues to serve a functional and integrative role in modern societies.

2. Methodology

The survey involved 193 respondents from five educational institutions: two secondary schools (St. Clement of Ohrid Theological School and Isa-Bey Madrasa) and three faculties (Faculty of Philosophy – Skopje, Orthodox Theological Faculty – Skopje, Faculty of Islamic Sciences – Skopje). The instrument consisted of 18 structured questions, grouped into three thematic blocks: (1) Religious attitudes and moral values, (2) Youth life challenges, and (3) Religion and ethics in education.

Responses were analyzed quantitatively. Correlation matrices were developed to examine relationships between religiosity, coping strategies, and educational attitudes. Special attention was paid to age-based patterns of psychosocial vulnerability.

The study is geographically limited to Skopje and institutionally oriented toward theological and humanities students. Findings may not generalize to all youth populations in North Macedonia but provide significant insight into urban, educated cohorts.

3. Findings

3.1. Religious attitudes and moral values

- 81% of respondents reported that ethics in religion influence their everyday lives.
- The dominant understanding of religiosity was not ritualistic but connected to ethical behavior and belief in God.
- Religiosity was strongly correlated with the belief that religion provides help in dealing with personal problems ($r \approx 0.95$).

3.2. Youth challenges and psychosocial vulnerability

- Younger respondents (15–18 years) reported much higher rates of stress, anxiety, and demotivation.

- A very strong negative correlation ($r \approx -0.98$) was found between age and reported psychosocial problems, indicating acute vulnerability during adolescence.
- Religious and ethical frameworks provided resilience, enabling coping with difficulties.

3.3 Religion and education

- 76% believed that knowledge of religious postulates fosters coexistence and tolerance in multicultural society.
- Religiosity was positively correlated with support for introducing ethics as a school subject ($r \approx 0.88$).
- A strong positive link was also observed between religiosity and support from parents and teachers in resolving moral dilemmas ($r \approx 0.71$).

4. Discussion

The findings underscore the enduring role of religion as both a personal and social resource for young people in North Macedonia. Religiosity is not only about doctrinal belief but functions as a practical coping mechanism, providing psychological support in times of stress.

This resonates with global scholarship emphasizing the importance of lived religion (Davie, 2015) and global ethics (Küng, 1991). In multiethnic societies, knowledge of religious values contributes to intercultural coexistence, aligning with Robertson's (1992) notion of 'glocalization.' Importantly, the findings highlight the vulnerability of adolescents, pointing to the need for supportive family and educational environments. The positive correlation between religiosity and perceived parental/teacher support suggests that religious frameworks strengthen intergenerational bonds in moral decision-making.

The educational implications are significant: a clear demand exists for integrating ethics and religion into curricula, not as confessional instruction but as values-based education that promotes coexistence, tolerance, and resilience.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that young people in North Macedonia possess a strong ethical orientation grounded in religiosity, use religion as a source of psychological resilience, and advocate for the integration of ethics and religion in education.

While challenges such as stress, anxiety, and lack of motivation remain acute, especially among adolescents, religion and ethics play a constructive role in addressing them. In a multicultural and multiconfessional society, this reinforces the relevance of religion not only as a private matter but also as a social capital for tolerance and coexistence.

Future research should expand the scope to rural areas, different types of schools, and comparative Balkan contexts, as well as explore qualitative dimensions of youth religiosity.

References

- Davie, G. (2015). *Religion in Britain: A Persistent Paradox*. London: Routledge.
- Küng, H. (1991). *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. New York: Crossroad.
- Robertson, R. (1992). *Globalization: Social Theory and Global Culture*. London: Sage.

Smith, C., & Denton, M. (2005). *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Religious Groups (2025). *Survey on Youth Attitudes toward Religion, Ethics, and Everyday Challenges* (unpublished data, Skopje).