

# A Garland and a Chain: The Persistent Influence of Family Religious Environment on Adult Adventist Church Members Raised in the Church



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## The Immersion Effect: Does family history modify the relationships between family environment and aspects of religiosity?

Religiosity is passed on within a family environment.

Three factors make the transmission of religion more likely: high parental religiosity, high quality family relationships, and a traditional family structure (Myers, 1996; Petts 2009). Family religiosity is more important in relatively secular cultures (Kelley & De Graaf, 1997).

Parental involvement is associated with greater internalization of religion among Adventist emerging adults.

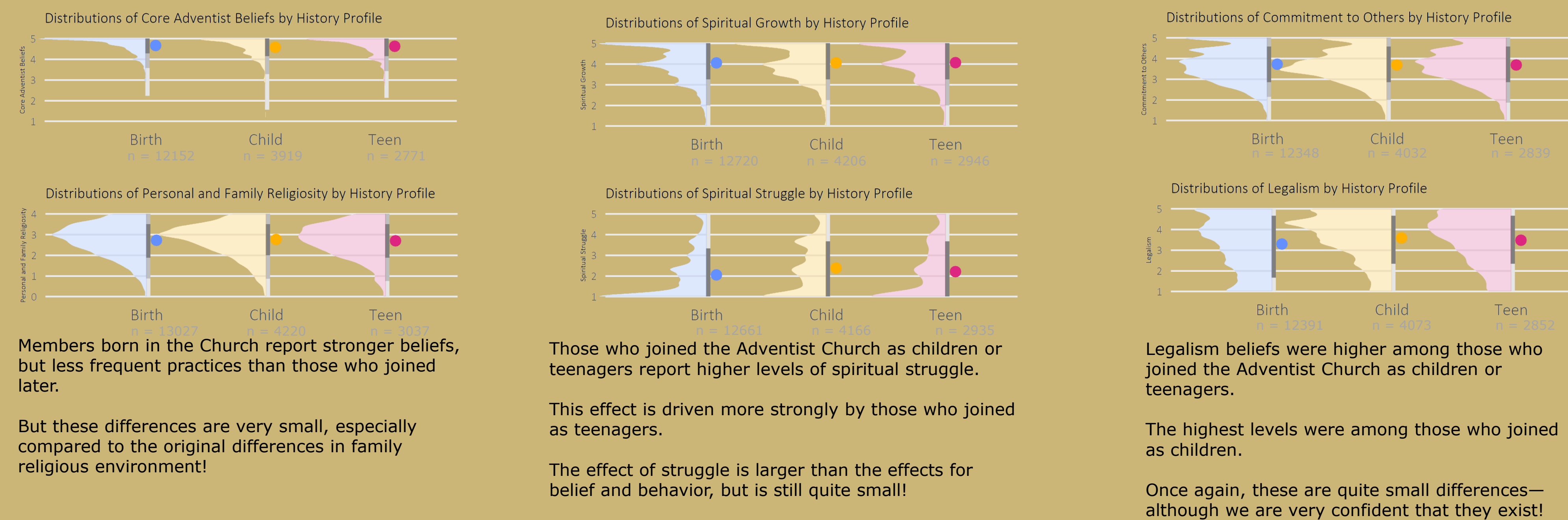
Retrospective reports of parental involvement in Adventist emerging adults were associated with internalization of distinctive Adventist practices (Sabbath-keeping) and Christian behaviors generally (Bailey et al., 2019).

Family rituals may be an important mechanism for religious transmission.

If family rituals (Fiese et al., 2002) are important for religious transmission, families who have more opportunities to develop routines and rituals might be more effective in intergenerational religious transmission. This predicts that time and parents' experience with Adventist routines and rituals might influence children's acceptance of Adventist beliefs and practices into adulthood.

Children whose families join the Adventist Church during their adolescence may experience religious transmission differently than those who are raised in the Church or whose families join earlier in their childhood.

We examined this *immersion effect* (driven by more time with Adventist family rituals) in two planned comparisons. In both, we tested to see whether differences in family history with the Adventist Church might moderate the influence of family religious environment on measures of religiosity.



Members born in the Church report stronger beliefs, but less frequent practices than those who joined later.

But these differences are very small, especially compared to the original differences in family religious environment!

Those who joined the Adventist Church as children or teenagers report higher levels of spiritual struggle.

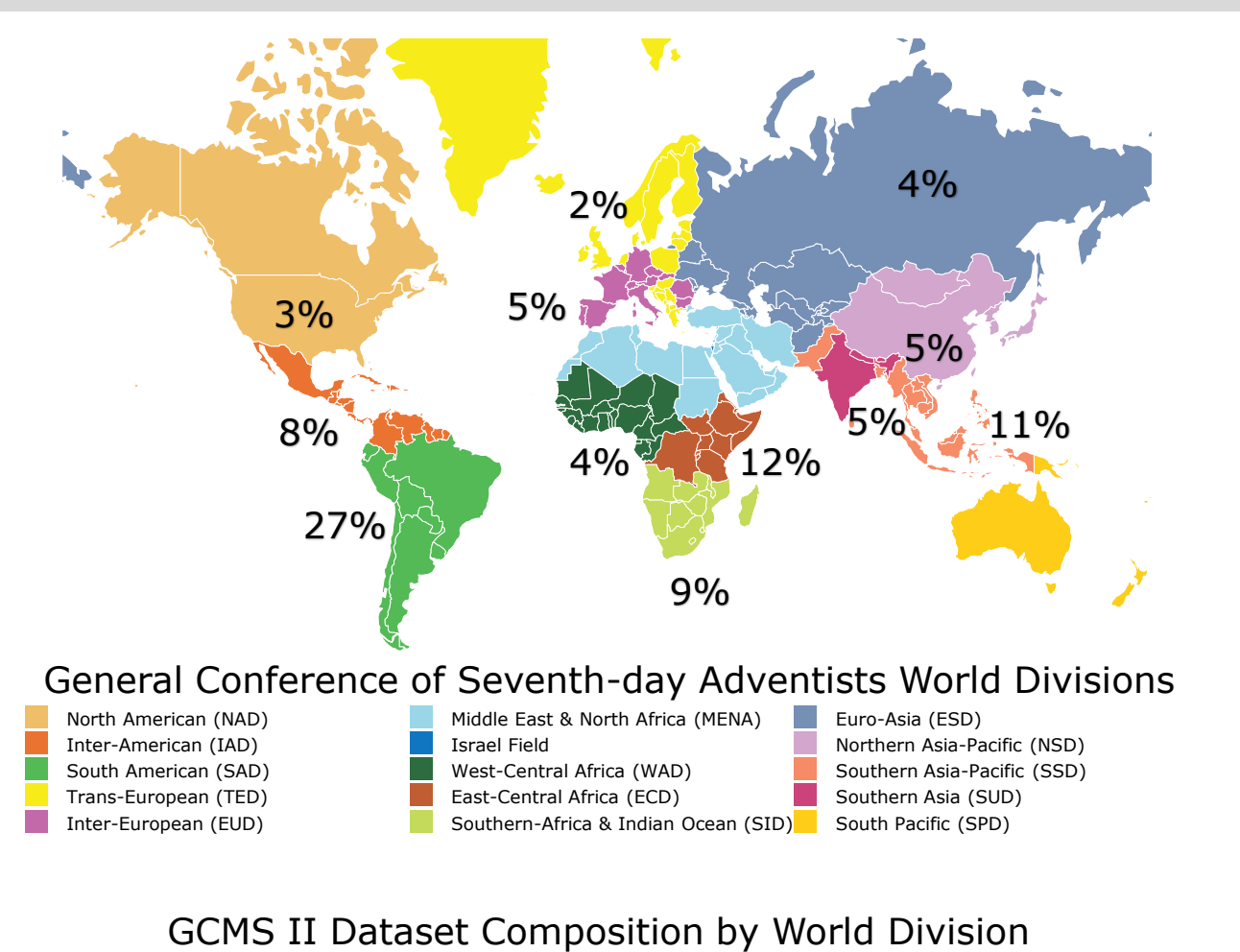
This effect is driven more strongly by those who joined as teenagers.

The effect of struggle is larger than the effects for belief and behavior, but is still quite small!

Legalism beliefs were higher among those who joined the Adventist Church as children or teenagers.

The highest levels were among those who joined as children.

Once again, these are quite small differences—although we are very confident that they exist!



### Methods

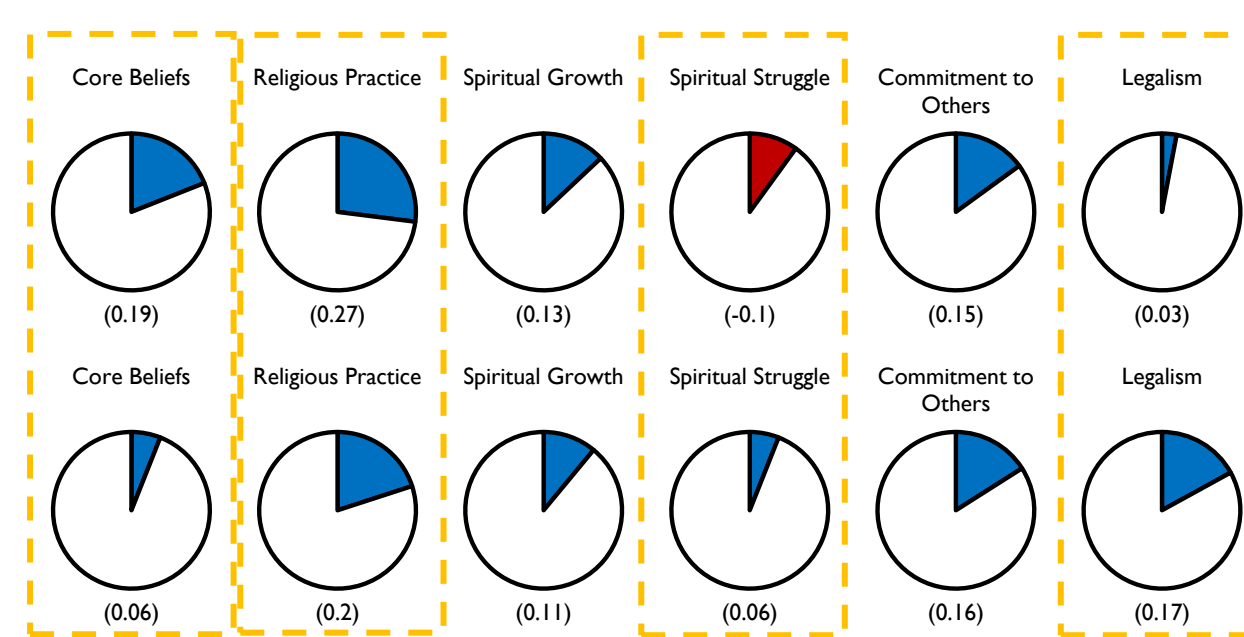
- Global Church Member Survey, Wave II
- Data collected 2017-2018; Total cases 63,756
  - Data come from a global survey of Seventh-day Adventist church members (distribution above)
  - Members are 'core' Adventists—most data was collected at Adventist churches from those present at or willing to commit time following worship services.
  - At least 55,000 valid responses on most questions examined.
  - Research teams from around the world familiar with each World Division of the Adventist Church were responsible for collecting the data.
  - Our meta-analysis team was responsible for analyzing the integrated global data.
  - The project was approved by the Andrews University IRB.

Characteristic	Routines of Daily Living	Rituals in Family Life
Communication	Instrumental "This is what needs to be done."	Symbolic "This is who we are."
Commitment	Perfunctory and momentary. Little conscious thought given after the act.	Enduring and affective. The experience may be repeated in memory. "This is right."
Continuity	Directly observable and detectable by outsiders. Behavior is repeated over time.	Meaning extends across generations and interpreted by insiders. "This is what we look forward to and who we will continue to be across generations."
Consequences for Well-Being	Evidence of family organization.	Fosters a sense of closeness, belonging, and identity.

Correlations with family religious environment differ by profile for core beliefs, religious practice, spiritual struggle, and legalism.

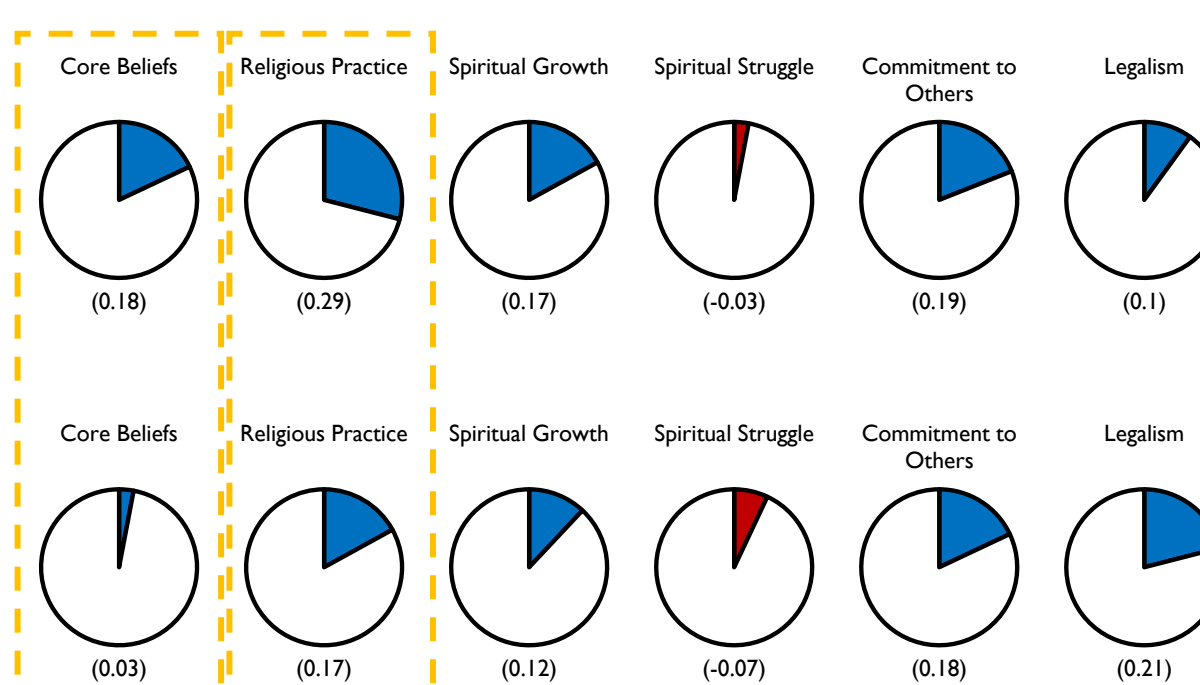
- Family religious environment
- enhanced core beliefs and religious practice
  - protected against spiritual struggle
  - showed an attenuated relationship with legalism
  - for those in the Adventist Church since birth.

Top row: correlations with family religious environment for those connected to the Adventist Church since birth.



Bottom row: correlations with family religious environment for those who joined the Adventist Church as children or teenagers.

Top row: correlations with family religious environment for those who joined the Adventist Church as children.



Top row: correlations with family religious environment for those who joined the Adventist Church as teenagers.

Correlations with family religious environment differ by profile for core beliefs and religious practice.

Family religious environment enhanced core beliefs and religious practice for those who joined the Adventist Church as children to a greater degree than for those who joined as teenagers.

Three personal history profiles:

- I did not grow up in the church and joined as a teenager.
- My family and I joined the Adventist Church when I was a child.
- I grew up in the church, and have been connected to the church since birth.

- We only included responses from people who were:
- age 21 or older at the start of the data collection wave
  - at least second-generation Adventist

<sup>8</sup>Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching.  
<sup>9</sup>They are a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck.

Proverbs 1:8-9

Our study shows a small but continuing influence of family religious environment and personal history with the Adventist Church on adult religiosity. Training families on effective family rituals is one of many tools for nurturing and discipling church members across the lifespan.

as presented at the Adventist Human Subjects Research Association 2022 meeting

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