

Gallup: Jews score highest on "well-being" survey

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(RNS) American Jews scored the highest of any religious group on a "well-being" index even though more than half of Jews are nonreligious, according to a new Gallup survey.

The Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index is based on a survey of more than 550,000 people who were scored on a number of categories, including emotional and physical health, work environment and healthy behaviors.

Jews were placed in the No. 1 spot, with an overall "well-being" score of 69.8, followed by nonreligious or atheists/agnostics, Catholics, Mormons, Muslims and other religions. Protestants scored the lowest, at 64.8.

Individual groups were also divided between the "very religious" (based on attendance at religious services and how important religion is in their lives), the "nonreligious" (who rarely attend services and say religion isn't important), and the "moderately religious," who fall somewhere in the middle.

More than half -- 55 percent -- of U.S. Jews were classified as "nonreligious" and just 16 percent were "very religious." Mormons, at 75 percent, were the most religious group.

Surprisingly, nonreligious Americans came in second on the overall "well-being" index. Gallup said this group, although small in size, likely scored high because it includes unaffiliated Americans -- who may be religious but don't belong to a specific faith group -- as well as unbelieving atheists and agnostics.

Even though the "very religious" accounted for just 2.5 percent of nonbelievers or the unaffiliated, they nonetheless scored higher (70.2) on the well-being index than their nonreligious counterparts (65.0).

"This suggests a well-being benefit to the church/synagogue/mosque-going experience that is independent of religious faith," a Gallup analysis said, "but instead may capitalize on the social aspects of attending religious institutions."

Across the board, all faith groups shared a gap of about 4 to 6 points between their most religious and least religious members, with the most religious groups consistently scoring higher overall well-being. Gallup said that finding shows that "religiosity matters to well-being, regardless of religious identity."

Overall, Gallup said the country is 44 percent very religious, 27 percent moderately religious and 30 percent nonreligious.

The survey, conducted Jan. 2-July 28, was the result of a partnership between Gallup and Healthways, a Tennessee company focused on health. It involved a random sample of 554,066 U.S. adults and had a margin of error of plus or minus 0.5 percentage points.