

# EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND RELIGION IN ALBANIA

<sup>1</sup>Dr. Fleura Shkëmbi

<sup>1</sup>*Department of Psychosocial Studies, Mediterranean University of Albania, Tirana, Albania, fleura.shkemi@umsh.edu.al*

## Abstract

This article focused on emotional skills and efficiency, i.e. on emotional intelligence and the relationship it has with religious belief as a whole, within the Albanian case. It should be noted that so far, there has been little attempt to link emotional intelligence (EI) to religion, and especially in the case of Albania where such studies are lacking. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to examine and investigate whether there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and having religious beliefs in this setting. To research further on this topic, the study used a quantitative study design. Primary data were collected through an online survey distributed in Google Forms, and analyzed in descriptive form through the article. A total of 291 participants participated in the study, of which most of them were female (88.3%). Also, most of the respondents were young age group, and we belonged to the age of 20-30 years (43.3%), as well as the age of 31-40 years (36.4%). Almost of the sample had at least at list one higher degree diploma. Whereas regarding the religion, half of the sample were self-reported as Muslim, whereas the other half were mixed. This study concluded that there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and religious beliefs in the study group in the case of Albania. It was concluded that the case of Albania was in fact a special case that it belongs to religious faiths entirely because of their own history, and that the foundations of religious tolerance in Albania are deeply rooted in traditions and social culture and do not come from consciousness, knowledge or practice of religious rites.

**Keywords:** emotional, intelligence, religion, Albania, case.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the field of religious diversity, Albania offers a very interesting case study. Religious coexistence is the most important achievement that has been made in the political and intellectual life in Albania. Albania is widely known for the peaceful coexistence between the main religions which are present in Albania today. Religions were suppressed during the communist regime and managed to be revived only in the early 90s, with the help of course of religious institutions, which have their origins since the country's independence in 1912. However, although religious tolerance and

harmony are among the most widespread public discussions, few studies have been conducted to understand the current situation and its relationship to other elements. In general, studies have focused only on explaining the phenomenon during the communist period, in which the Albanian state was deprived and completely stripped of its religious beliefs. On the other hand, the relationship of psychology with religious beliefs has been an area which has been of great interest, in its relationship with various theological, philosophical and anthropological research. Therefore, she has also ignited a certain interest in the field of psychology, but

still remains modest given the potential importance of this relationship. Exploring the relationship between religion and emotional intelligence in the field of psychology can help to better understand the role of both factors in psychosocial functioning. Religion can serve as a source of emotion or control of certain emotions and can affect the overall emotional well-being of different individuals. Moreover, religious beliefs and practices have been associated with various processes of emotion regulation in the population. It is also claimed that people who apply and follow different religions may exhibit increased emotional awareness as well as greater self-control skills. Therefore, this article will focus specifically on emotional skills and efficiency, i.e. on emotional intelligence and the relationship it has with religious belief as a whole, in Albanian case. It should be noted that so far, there has been little attempt to link emotional intelligence (EI) to religion, and especially in the case of Albania where such studies are lacking. Therefore, the purpose of the current study is to examine and investigate whether there is a relationship between emotional intelligence and having religious beliefs.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Relevant studies regarding the relationship between religion and Emotional Intelligence

In the foreign literature, the first study related to the topic in question is that by Paek (2006), who found that EI (self-reported), had a positive correlation with some religious behaviors, and above all had the relationship with high correlation with having an inner religious orientation. Personal religious orientations, within the IE, have also been the subject of numerous studies in the literature. In these studies, the positive correlation between perceived emotional abilities (tested with the Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire) and internal religious orientation in some parts of the world is often repeated. Studies have even found that having an external orientation (where religion is seen as a means to other ends) seems to be negatively related to

emotional intelligence as a whole (Butt 2014). All of these studies have shed some light on understanding the possible link between emotional intelligence and religion. But, at the same time, they suffer from some limitations, as we must emphasize that most studies are based on the self-declaration of emotional intelligence (Łowicki & Zajenkowski, 2017). In a study by Nesami et al. (2015) found that individuals' religious orientation has a significant impact on personal attitudes and behaviors. The study was conducted with 335 students of which 144 students were male (43%) and 191 were female (57%). The findings of this study showed that, there is a direct correlation between positive religious coping and emotional intelligence. The study also concluded that strengthening religious coping can further promote emotional intelligence, which is a component of individuals' mental health (Nesami et al., 2015). On the other hand, in a study by Liu (2010), similar results were found. The main purpose of his study was to investigate the relationship between personal religious orientation and emotional intelligence. This study involved 497 students and employees in various companies, whose results were used to test the hypothesis raised by the author. The study concluded that even in this case, internal religious orientation had a significant positive correlation with emotional intelligence. However, the study found that in fact, external religious orientation has a negative correlation with emotional intelligence (Liu, 2010). Theoretical and practical implications of religious orientation and emotional intelligence are discussed for both academics and practitioners in the field. A study by Peak (2006), who is also one of the pioneers in this field, first put forward the thesis that despite numerous studies linking religion to various psycho-social criteria, it has not been fully explored in relation to emotional intelligence (EI), the ability to perceive, understand and manage emotions towards adaptive behavior. In this context, the study examined the extent to which religious belief, functionalized as religious orientation and behavior, was related to self-perceived emotional intelligence, in a deliberate capitulation of 148 persons of Christian faith

closely related to the church environment. The findings of the study showed that there was a positive correlation between internal religious orientation and perceived emotional intelligence, and in particular, emotional comprehension of its subcomponent, as well as emotional and cognitive empathy among the respondents of the study (Paek, 2006).

Another study investigated the correlation of emotional intelligence, social skills, and religious behavior only among female students, as it was observed that there was an escalation in the frequency of some behavioral and emotional problems such as vandalism, aggression, social attraction, weakness of social relations, weak models of friendship between female students, lack of positive social attributes, indifference, neglect of lectures as well as frequent absence in class. In this study the sample was composed of 338 female students selected by the method of intentional sampling in two departments of Islamic Studies and Arabic Language. The study findings found that the average grade for emotional intelligence among female students was relatively high. The average grade also for religious behavior among female students was high (Al-Tamimi & Al-Khawaldeh, 2016). Meanwhile the findings of another study similar to the latter in nature, sampling and purpose, came to the conclusion that the relationship of spiritual intelligence from the specific perspective of Islamic fees with emotional intelligence was relatively high. The study also found statistically significant relationships between the four dimensions of spiritual intelligence from an Islamic perspective (for example transcendental awareness, meaning of life, patience, and forgiveness) with emotional intelligence (Anwar, Gani & Rahman, 2020). Similar to the conclusions of this study, and considering the necessity of recognizing the factors influencing students' religious orientation, another study investigated the relationship of religious orientation and belief with the components of emotional intelligence in students of Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences. The study consisted of a sample of 63 students, of whom 32 were girls and 31 were boys, with a

random selection. The findings of this study showed that external and internal religious orientation had a statistically significant relationship and that it had a significant effect on the components of emotional intelligence at the 5% level (Tajabadi, 2017). Other more recent studies show different results of the latter. An actual study by Łowicki, Zajenkowski & van der Linden (2019), with a study sample of 501 respondents, examined the interaction between the three main constructs, that of cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence, and religious belief. The results showed that cognitive intelligence was positively correlated with emotional intelligence ability and negatively with some of the fee components obtained in the analysis. Emotional intelligence, on the other hand, did not result in any direct relationship with any component of religious beliefs. However, in the constructed model of regression, with all three basic components, it was observed that emotional intelligence was in fact a significant positive predictor of religion (Łowicki, Zajenkowski & van der Linden, 2019).

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to investigate whether there is a link between emotional intelligence and religion among citizens in Albania. To research further on this topic, the study used a quantitative study design. Primary data were collected through an online survey, and were analyzed in descriptive form. The sampling of the study was random. There was no predisposition to take a certain sample, but the survey in online format was left open to be completed by all interested parties. Therefore, the sample was only intentional. The survey distributed consisted of 2 main sections. The first section contained questions related to the demographic information of the participants, asking questions such as age, gender, education, city of birth and their religious beliefs. Meanwhile the second section was fully attributed to the Emotional Intelligence Scale, developed by Schutte et al. (1998).

A total of 291 participants participated in the study, of which most of them were female (88.3%) and a few of them were male (11.3%). Most of the respondents were young age group, and we belonged to the age of 20-30 years (43.3%), as well as the age of 31-40 years (36.4%). A minority belonged to the age of 41-50 years (17.9%) and the age of 51-60 years (2.1%). Regarding the level of education, most of the respondents had completed or had completed university studies (66%) or had

higher degrees (26.5%). Very little of the sampling belonged to the primary level of education (1%) or even the secondary one (6.2%). The sampling was distributed in all counties in Albania, in order to have the most comprehensive sampling, however, since Tirana is the capital and holds the largest population, even in the study it constituted the largest percentage of respondents. The results can be seen in the table below.

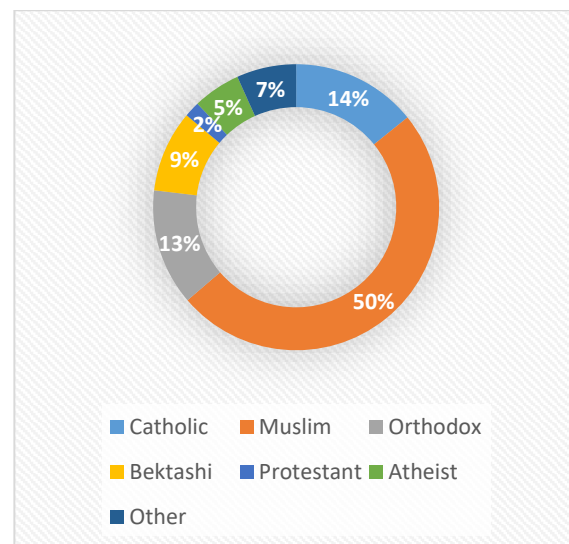
**Table 1. Birthplace**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Berat county	20	6.9	6.9	6.9
	Dibra county	20	6.9	6.9	13.9
	Durres county	23	7.9	8.0	21.9
	Elbasan county	18	6.2	6.3	28.1
	Fier county	21	7.2	7.3	35.4
	Gjirokastra county	13	4.5	4.5	39.9
	Korca county	14	4.8	4.9	44.8
	Kukes county	17	5.8	5.9	50.7
	Lezha county	14	4.8	4.9	55.6
	Shkodra county	11	3.8	3.8	59.4
	Tirana county	108	37.1	37.5	96.9
	Vlora county	9	3.1	3.1	100.0
	Total		288	99.0	100.0
Missing	System	3	1.0		
Total		291	100.0		

**Graph 1. Religion**

**4. RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

As we can see from the graph below, half of the respondents were of the Muslim religion, while the other half were followed by slightly smaller percentages of Catholics and Orthodox. 7% of respondents stated that they did not belong to any of the major religious groups, and were classified under the other category. Among their answers, the predominant religions in this category were agnostics and Protestants, but there were also participants who described that they believed in God but in no religion, or that they belonged to Monotheism, Spiritualism, Hinduism religion etc.



The second section of the questionnaire which was administered to the respondents was related to the measurement of the degree of emotional intelligence of the respondents participating in the study. Below are the results for each question as well as their evaluation.

The result for each question represents the maximum points, the minimum points, the average of the points for each question and the standard deviation for them. To determine the final level of emotional intelligence level of the respondent in the study, below is the result of collecting points for each of the respondents, presenting it in descriptive average values. The measuring instrument administered to the respondents presented, as we can see from the table below, a 32-item questionnaire, in which

the questions varied on a Likert scale from 1 point - Strongly disagree, up to 5 points - Strongly agree, which results from a minimum of 3 points of the sum of the points collected of the instrument up to a maximum of 160 points. The minimum points are attributed to a low Emotional Intelligence of the respondents, while the maximum points are attributed to a high Emotional Intelligence. The following table gives the results for each questionnaire question.

**Table 2. Emotional Intelligence descriptive statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
I know when to talk about my personal problems with others	281	1.00	7.00	2.7794	1.65866
When I face obstacles, I remember other times when I faced similar obstacles and passed them	289	1.00	5.00	4.1142	.85641
I look forward to doing well in most of the things I try	291	1.00	5.00	4.0172	.83235
Other people find it easy to trust me	291	1.0	5.0	4.017	.7403
I find it hard to understand other people's nonverbal messages	290	1.00	5.00	3.8207	.90877
Some of the big events in my life have made me reevaluate what is important and what is not important	291	1.00	5.00	2.3196	1.09746
When my mood changes, I see new opportunities	291	1.00	5.00	4.4708	.64994
Emotions are one of the things that make my life worth living	291	1.00	5.00	3.5464	1.00021
I am aware of my emotions as I experience them	291	1.00	5.00	4.1478	.80654
I expect good things to happen	291	1.00	5.00	4.0962	.76408
I like to share my emotions with others	291	1.00	5.00	4.1959	.70914
When I experience a positive emotion, I know how to make it last	290	1.00	5.00	3.7483	.91626
I organize events that others enjoy.	291	1.00	5.00	3.5808	.94111
I look for activities that make me happy	291	1.00	5.00	3.3746	1.05401
I am aware of the nonverbal messages I send to others	291	1.00	5.00	4.0447	.81456
I present myself in a way that leaves a good impression on others	291	1.00	5.00	3.8797	.76291
When I'm in a good mood, I find it easy to solve problems	291	1.00	5.00	3.8076	.91581
Looking at their facial expressions, I discern what emotions people are experiencing	291	1.00	5.00	4.1546	.82219
I know why my emotions change	291	1.00	5.00	4.1100	.73457
When I'm in a good mood, I'm able to generate new ideas	291	2.00	5.00	4.0206	.68952
I have control over my emotions	291	1.00	5.00	4.2062	.71830
I easily discern my emotions while experiencing them.	290	1.00	5.00	3.4828	.93085
I motivate myself by imagining good results for the tasks I undertake	291	1.00	5.00	3.9141	.75852
I compliment others when they do something right	291	1.00	5.00	3.9863	.80074
I'm aware of the nonverbal messages that others send.	291	1.00	5.00	4.4502	.66444
When another person tells me about an important event in their life, I almost feel like I experienced that event myself	291	1.00	5.00	3.8385	.76881
When I feel a change in emotions, I tend to generate new ideas.	289	1.00	5.00	3.7785	.88942
When faced with a challenge I do not give up because I believe I will win	291	1.00	5.00	3.5223	.82755
I know what other people feel just by seeing them	289	1.00	5.00	3.9343	.79876

I help people feel better when they are bad	291	1.00	5.00	3.5498	.85102
I use good moods to help myself keep trying in the face of obstacles	290	1.00	5.00	4.3069	.63814
I can discern how people feel listening to the tone of their voice	288	2.00	5.00	4.0729	.70208
Valid N (listwise)	269				

Meanwhile, the following table presents in full the result of the respondents and the self-perceived levels of the respondents regarding their Emotional Intelligence. From the results of our respondents we see that their scoring varies from 66 points minimally, up to 149

points maximum. With an overall average of 120.3 points. So we see that our respondents express an above-average emotional intelligence, generally respondents have high emotional intelligence.

**Table 3. Descriptive Statistics**

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Emotional Intelligence	291	66.00	149.00	120.3505	11.54127
Valid N (listwise)	291				

Of course, emotional intelligence includes the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate between oneself, and to use this information to guide one's own thoughts and actions. In finding this study respondents are presented with a self-perception with high levels and above average emotional intelligence in general. The results can be attributed to their culture as a strong sense of belonging. Another reason for the high level of emotional intelligence among the respondents may be the particular lifestyle or socio-cultural context of their society. Socio-economic status and high academic educational skills may be some of the factors that account for the high emotional intelligence between

them, as these conditions provide a stimulating environment for them to develop competent emotional skills. In fact, the sampling of the study itself consisted for the most part of participants who had already completed higher education or more. It can be concluded that the socio-cultural, economic and educational variables of the respondents function as a stimulating and not limiting factor to be emotionally more intelligent than the average.

In the table below we see presented the Pearson correlation performed to understand in case there any relationship is found between the emotional intelligence of the respondents and the religious beliefs (or in any other demographic data) within the study group.

**Table 4. Correlations**

		Emotional Intelligence	Gender	Age	Education	Birthplace	Religion
Emotional Intelligence	Pearson Correlation	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)						
	N	291					
Gender	Pearson Correlation	.095	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.106					
	N	290	290				
Age	Pearson Correlation	.099	-.028	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.094	.639				
	N	290	290	290			
Education	Pearson Correlation	.062	.113	.039	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.292	.054	.505			
	N	290	290	290	290		

Birthplace	Pearson Correlation	.011	.111	.052	.038	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.849	.061	.375	.521		
	N	288	288	288	288	288	
Religion	Pearson Correlation	-.057	-.150*	-.091	-.058	-.066	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.341	.012	.130	.331	.273	
	N	281	280	280	280	278	281

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The correlation results show us in fact that there is no statistically significant relationship between different religious beliefs and emotional intelligence between the grouping analyzed in Albania. This can be explained by many reasons, which makes the case of Albania very special. Albanians consider religious tolerance as a fundamental value, more deeply rooted in their tradition and moral and social values than experienced as a practice, belief, or social policy, which are based on the recognition of different religions and acceptance of religious differences. Thus, tradition, civic education, and moral values serve as a common ground for most (non-religious) Albanians, who believe that a more religious society is likely to be less tolerant of religion on the one hand, while devout believers do not perceive religious belief and tolerance as mutually exclusive. Most Albanians lead a secular life. They have little information or knowledge about religion and oppose the idea that religious views should shape or condition their way of life, their mental health, their cognitive intelligence, emotional intelligence or emotions in general. Although many as we saw from the study, consider themselves practicing religion or part of a specific religion. Of course, the percentages are lower among those who practice the religion, with less than two out of ten Albanians practicing religious rites regularly, or being guided by religious rules in their daily lives. It is concluded that the perception that prevails among Albanians who practice religion is related to the belief that religious belief has more to do with belief in God than performing religious rites. In this sense, prayer as a religious rite or custom is not necessarily an indication of a person practicing the religion. About half of Albanians who pray regularly, every day or week, state that they regularly practice all religious rites. However,

the attitudes that give greater importance to the practice of religious rites have some solid foundations in Albanian society, especially in rural communities and to some extent among Albanians. These individuals are more aware of their religious belief and also see the practice of religious rites as a fundamental part of life as religious believers practicing their religion. Most Albanians lead a secular life: They have little information or knowledge about religion and oppose the idea that religious views should shape or condition their way of life. Albanians welcome the religious diversity that is present in the country and strongly oppose the idea of the superiority of one religion over others, regardless of the size of the respective religious community. In addition, Albanians strongly oppose negative stereotypes about religious groups or individuals based on their religious affiliation. Thus, religious affiliation is not a factor by which people are characterized by qualities, such as hardworking, friendly, intelligent, violent, or lazy. Most Albanians share the same opinion about the feeling of danger or anxiety when it comes to members of other religious groups, thus revealing a non-sectarian empathy (sensitivity). The above context regarding the religious belief and religious awareness of Albanians shapes people's perceptions of religious tolerance in Albania; how it manifests itself; the factors that enable it; and the risks it faces. Although the national identity has as a strong basis the ideological support of the secularism of the Albanian state since its creation, today's Albanian society still highly values the well-known slogan of the Albanian Renaissance: "The religion of the Albanian is Albanianness." (Gjergji et al., 2018). It is in this context that the "lack of information on religion as the most frequently reported factor for religious tolerance in Albania" can be noted. This conclusion is also supported by the fact that the

second most frequently reported factor that enables religious tolerance in the country, according to this study, is "the predominance of national traditions and culture over religious ones." Although Albanians highly value the role of leaders of religious communities and local clergy in promoting religious tolerance in the country, the key instruments that enable such tolerance are fundamentally secular and relate to values such as respect for individual freedoms and the supremacy of tradition and national consciousness over religious ones. Together, these three factors are most often reported by Albanians themselves, factors that enable religious tolerance and are an integral part of the fourth most frequently reported factor: secularism. The fifth factor - the communist legacy of atheism - divides the respondents of this study in terms of their opinions on this factor as an enabling factor, where there are differences in views between the younger and older generations. Thus, Albanians who have experienced and remember the communist past consider the legacy of atheism as a factor that has contributed to religious tolerance to a much higher percentage compared to the younger generations. However, as shown by the further analyzes undertaken by this study (focus group discussions), heritage is not perceived as a factor that promotes religious tolerance, but rather as a circumstance to justify the hostility of the communist regime (Gjergji et al., 2018).

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study concluded that there is no relationship between emotional intelligence and religious beliefs in the study group in the case of Albania. It was concluded that the case of Albania was in fact a special case that it belongs to religious faiths entirely because of their own history, and that the foundations of religious tolerance in Albania are deeply rooted in traditions and social culture and do not come from consciousness, knowledge or practice of religious rites. As they recognize the role of religious leaders in promoting religious tolerance today and throughout history, Albanians attach greater importance to the legal

and practical separation between state and religion; respect for fundamental human rights and freedoms; secularism as a feature of society; and national feelings, as key factors enabling religious tolerance. Therefore, their emotions and their emotional development are not at all related to religious beliefs as a whole. Religious tolerance as a fundamental value of Albanian society is an element of unity for citizens with different religious affiliations in the country. Given the religious diversity of Albanian society, maintaining social cohesion and religious tolerance and harmony, even in turbulent times, has been an extraordinary achievement, which makes its impact on mental health as well as emotional regulation of the individual (hence including emotional intelligence) not at all related to the latter.

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