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## RELIGIOSITY, NON-RELIGIOSITY AND SPIRITUALITY: DIVERSITY IN THE PERCEPTIONS OF KAZAKHSTANI YOUTH

The study extends the scope of understanding of the religious/spiritual landscape of Kazakhstan society, which is subject to significant changes caused by macro and micro contextual factors and the growth of new religious/spiritual forms of believe. It aims to assess the complex and straightforwardness of the religious consciousness of Kazakhstani youth, its key role in changing traditional religious practices and attitudes, and attempts to adapt them to modern realities and challenges. The departure of young people from traditional models of organised religiosity and the search for mystical experience and other alternative forms of religiosity/spirituality, manifested in the growing interest in Eastern religious teachings and personal spiritual practices, actualises the research and practical significance.

This article presents a sociological analysis of the religious and spiritual attitudes of Kazakhstan youth based on two waves of data collected through quantitative surveys (December 2023 – March 2024) among youth aged 18-35. The sample size is 2000 respondents, with regional quotas based on age and gender applied. Professional 3KA software (licence E-B-9979) facilitated qualitative data collection. IBM SPSS Statistics version 30.0.0.0 (172) was used to analyse the quantitative data.

The study used modern sociological tools to measure Kazakhstan youth's religiosity/spirituality, identity and well-being. An adapted version of the Five Dimensions of Religiosity questionnaire (Pearce et al., 2017) was used to measure indicators of religiosity, and the Bogardus scale and Cronbach's alpha coefficient were used to measure social distance, providing a statistical measure of reliability and internal consistency. The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, contingency tables, chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), correlation analysis, and the Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples. The study's results demonstrate different patterns of Kazakhstan youth's perception of religious/non-religious and spiritual beliefs.

**Key words:** religiosity, spirituality, youth, hijab, spiritual practices, religious identity, faith, belief.

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### Діндарлық, дінсіздік және руханилық: жас қазақстандықтардың қабылдауындағы алуантүрлілік

Бұл зерттеу макро- және микроконтекстік факторлардың және діни/рухани көріністің жаңа формаларының өсуінен елеулі өзгерістерге ұшыраған қазақстандық қоғамның діни құрылымын түсіну шеңберін кеңейтеді. Ол қазақстандық жастардың діни санасындағы күрделі және қарапайымдылықты, оның дәстүрлі діни әдет-ғұрыптар мен көзқарастарды өзгертудегі шешуші рөлін және оларды заманауи шындықтар мен сын-қатерлерге бейімдеу әрекеттерін бағалауға бағытталған. Жастардың ұйымдасқан діндарлықтың дәстүрлі үлгілерінен алшақтауы, сондай-ақ шығыс діни ілімдері мен жеке рухани тәжірибелерге деген қызығушылықтың артуы арқылы көрінетін мистикалық тәжірибе мен діншілдіктің/руханияттың басқа балама түрлерін іздестіру ғылыми-зерттеу және тәжірибелік маңыздылығын өзекті етеді.

Бұл мақалада 18-35 жас аралығындағы респонденттерді қамтитын сандық сауалнамалардың екі толқыны (2023 ж. желтоқсан – 2024 ж. наурыз) деректеріне негізделген қазақстандық жастардың діни/рухани көзқарастарының әлеуметтанулық талдауы берілген. Іріктемелі жиынтық көлемі аймақты, жасты және жынысты ескере отырып, квоталау негізінде есептелген 2000 респондентті құрады. Professional 3ka (E-B-9979 лицензиясы) бағдарламасын пайдалану деректерді сапалы жинауға ықпал етті. Деректерді өңдеу IBM Statistics SPSS Version 30.0.0.0 (172) бағдарламасы арқылы жүзеге асырылды.

Зерттеу қазақстандық жастардың діндарлығын/руханилығын, әл-ауқатын және жеке басын өлшеу үшін заманауи социологиялық құралдарды пайдаланды. Діндарлық көрсеткіштерін анықтау үшін «Діндарлықтың бес өлшемін» сауалнамасының бейімделген нұсқасын, сондай-

меттік қашықтықты және Кронбах альфа коэффициентін өлшеуге арналған Богардус шкаласын пайдалану сенімділік пен ішкі жүйеліліктің статистикалық өлшемін беруге мүмкіндік берді. Деректерді талдау кезінде сипаттамалық статистика әдістері, күтпеген жағдайлар кестелері, хи-квадрат ( $\chi^2$ ), корреляциялық талдау және тәуелсіз үлгілер үшін Манн-Уитни U тесті қолданылды. Зерттеу нәтижелері жас қазақстандықтардың діни/діни емес және рухани наным-сенімдерді қабылдауының әртүрлі үлгілерін көрсетеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** діндарлық, руханилық, жастар, хиджаб, рухани тәжірибелер, діни сәйкестілік, сенім, сенім

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### **Религиозность, нерелигиозность и духовность: разнообразие в восприятии молодых казахстанцев**

Настоящее исследование расширяет рамки осмысления религиозной структуры казахстанского общества, претерпевающего значительные изменения, вызванные макро- и микроконтекстуальными факторами и ростом новых форм религиозного и духовного самовыражения. Оно направлено на оценку сложного и простого в религиозном сознании казахстанской молодежи, ее ключевой роли в изменении традиционных религиозных практик и взглядов, и попыток их адаптации к современным реалиям и вызовам. Отход молодежи от традиционных моделей организованной религиозности, а также поиск мистического опыта и других альтернативных форм религиозности/духовности, проявляющихся в растущем интересе к восточным религиозным учениям и личным духовным практикам, актуализирует значимость исследования.

В настоящей статье представлен социологический анализ религиозных/духовных установок казахстанской молодежи, основанный на данных двух волн количественных опросов (декабрь 2023 – март 2024 гг.), охватывающих респондентов в возрасте 18–35 лет. Объем выборочной совокупности – 2000 респондентов с применением регионального квотирования, на основе возраста и пола. Использование программы Professional 3КА (лицензия E-B-9979) способствовало качественному сбору данных. Обработка данных проведена с применением программы IBM Statistics SPSS Version 30.0.0.0 (172).

В исследовании использованы современные социологические инструменты для измерения религиозности/духовности, благосостояния и идентичности казахстанской молодежи. Применение адаптированной версии опросника Five Dimensions of Religiosity (Pearce et al., 2017) к определению индикаторов религиозности, а также шкалы Богардуса для измерения социальной дистанции и коэффициента альфа-Кронбаха позволили обеспечить статистическую меру надежности и внутреннюю согласованность. При анализе данных использованы методы описательной статистики, таблицы сопряженности, хи-квадрат ( $\chi^2$ ), корреляционный анализ и критерий U Манна-Уитни для независимых выборок. Результаты исследования демонстрируют различные паттерны восприятия религиозных/нерелигиозных и духовных убеждений молодыми казахстанцами.

**Ключевые слова:** религиозность, духовность, молодежь, хиджаб, духовные практики, религиозная идентичность, вера, убеждение.

## **Introduction**

Over the past decade, Kazakhstani society has undergone a significant shift, characterised by a consistent increase in the proportion of the population engaging with religious practices. According to the official 2021 census, approximately 70 % of the population identifies as Muslim. While in 2009, 11 million out of 16 million residents identified themselves as Muslims, in 2021 it reached to 13 million out of 19 million people (Bureau of National Statistics: 2021). The Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan defines the share of the reli-

gious population as 86.6 %, of which Islam – 69.3%, Christianity – 17.2 %, Judaism and Buddhism – less than 0.1 %. The proportion of non-believers continues to fall steadily from 2.8 % to 2.3 % in 2021 (Bureau of National Statistics: 2021)

Religious commitment among young people is still relatively strong, but the degree of religiosity remains diverse. The results of a survey conducted by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Kazakhstan (2021) show that the majority of Kazakhstan's youth – 55.1% – consider themselves religious, but at the same time they don't practice any religious practices and don't participate in religious life. The breakdown by religious affiliation was as follows: 63.9%

profess Islam, 23.6% Orthodox Christianity, 0.7% Catholicism, 0.6% Protestantism and 0.2% Buddhism (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Kazakhstan, 2021).

A sociological research conducted by the Scientific Research Centre “Youth” in 2024 indicates a decline in religious affiliation among the youth demographic. In 2023, 83.1% of Kazakh youth self-identified as religious, of whom 8.9% were practising believers (Youth of Kazakhstan: 2023). However, the results of the research in 2024 indicate a decrease to 78.3% of young Kazakhs who identify themselves religious, among whom 43.6% believe however do not actively participate in religious activities; 18.0% believe from time to time, and visit a mosque or church; and 16.7% fully adhere to their religion’s principles (Youth of Kazakhstan, 2024). A survey conducted by the Institute of Philosophy, Political Science and Religious Studies of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education showed a trend of change in the religious affiliation of various demographic groups. The proportion of respondents affiliated to a religious community and participating in religious practices in the 18-24 age group reached 23.2%. However, within the 45-54 age group, this proportion is lower- 11.7 % (Isabaeva, 2024).

Contemporary Kazakhstani society provides a unique context for exploring youth religiosity/spirituality, well-being and identity, including social change, religious diversity and identity, globalisation, and regional traditions, all of which facilitate the adaptation of people’s spiritual ideas and practices.

#### *Justification of the choice of articles and goals and objectives*

The article analyses a comparative country study of the religiosity and spirituality, wellbeing and identity of Kazakhstani youth. The objective is to determine their religious commitment, the correlates of religiosity and spirituality, and the main trends in their manifestation. The following hypotheses for the study are defined based on the established goal:

H<sub>1</sub>. Family upbringing and constant close contact with religious people (friends, relatives, neighbours.) increases the likelihood that young people will consider themselves religious.

H<sub>2</sub>. Respondents who identify as religious and consider faith an important part of their lives are more likely to visit places of worship, pray, and perform religious rituals regularly.

H<sub>3</sub>. The perception of hijab as an element of religious practice will differ depending on gender, type of locality and religious identification of the respondent.

## **Literature review**

In recent years, sociological literature has been characterised by an increase in research studies on the religious and spiritual experiences of young people, especially in the context of the changing religious landscape. Scholars have noted the decline of traditional religious affiliation accompanied by the rise of alternative forms of spiritual practice and identity in society, especially among young people, whose community clearly exhibits a diversity and fluidity of religious and spiritual practices (Pew Research Center, 2016).

Youth research indicates that the study of young people’s religious and spiritual experiences is crucial in the context of their transition to adulthood, in the process of identity reconstruction (its change in response to new circumstances and experiences) and replication of life values (as the reproduction or imitation of existing identities, often to preserve traditions or cultural characteristics) (Jensen, 2021). The results of various sociological studies show that globalisation leads to better education, to an increase in religious pluralism and to a desire for secularism among young people (Stolz, 2020). As a result, traditional religiosity tends to decline while alternative forms of spirituality emerge and spread. This shift reflects young people’s growing desire for more personalised and authentic forms of religious and spiritual expression.

Such changes reflect a broader transformation in the religious landscape, where traditional religious practices are less evident while new alternative religious forms are developing in the youth community. In the context of young people being free to express their religious and spiritual beliefs, they often go beyond traditional understandings to adapt them to individual needs. For example, comparative studies of religion show that even people who identify as non-religious can retain a connection to religion through relevant cultural and moral dimensions (Balazka et al., 2021). The dichotomous understanding of “religious/non-religious” often becomes inapplicable to some aspects of faith, ritual, or participation in a religious community. Many people may not consider themselves religious in the traditional sense but may still uphold moral principles, participate in religious/spiritual practices, and vice versa. At the same time, many researchers have noted that the emergence of new religious movements and alternative spiritual practices among young people demonstrates the inflexibility of traditional religious institutions, as a desire for identity often drives young people’s reli-

gious and spiritual quests (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023).

As Davie (1990) noted, some may embrace and believe in particular elements of religion but not regularly participate in religious activities. Such practices are often called “private Christianity” or “faith without belonging”. With the development of religious individualism, the separation of religious experience from institutional faith can be observed, and practices of religiosity may take the form of external or, conversely, internal religiosity. As Siegers (2019) noted, external religiosity manifests itself when religious practice serves as a tool to satisfy personal and social needs not directly related to religious faith, such as gaining social support, recognition, or personal comfort within the community. At the same time, internal religiosity is characterised by religious beliefs being central to a person’s life in a broader religious sense, where examples of such beliefs may be the relationship that people have with God (e.g. private prayer and other individual practices) (Siegers, 2019).

Researchers are increasingly turning to the study of self-identification as “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR), which has become a prominent trend in the contemporary religious landscape. The rise in popularity of this identity has sparked interest in understanding the experiences and worldviews of people who categorise themselves as such (Fuller & Parsons, 2018). However, the term SBNR remains challenging to conceptualise and often requires interpretation of the concepts of religiosity and spirituality. Fuller (2001) clarifies that spirituality focuses on individual experience and personal interpretation of meaning, whereas religion involves institutionalised forms of belief, rituals and collective practices. At first glance, spirituality and religion may appear similar, but their key differences lie in context. As noted (Koenig et al., 2001), religion is an organised system of beliefs, rituals and symbols aiming to achieve unity with the sacred or transcendent. While spirituality is a personal quest to understand existence, transcendental experiences, or higher powers, it does not necessarily require affiliation with religious institutions. Naudé & Capitano (2021) note that spirituality is related to soul development. It involves the inner world of the individual as well as a relationship with the divine and the unseen. It is this individualised nature of spirituality that makes SBNR identity a significant topic for study, especially in the aspect of its growing popularity in contemporary society.

Willard & Norenzayan (2017) note that the concept of “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR) remains difficult to understand, as those who place themselves in this category seek to separate their identity from religion and non-religious groups. However, as Chaves (2017) indicated, most Americans exhibit a unique blend of personal beliefs and practices without viewing them as incompatible. This approach reflects a more individualised picture of religiosity, where elements of both traditional religions and personal spiritual practices can co-exist, creating a new type of identity.

Moreover, most researchers perceive the concepts of religiosity and spirituality as identical. Despite this, as Ammerman (2013) noted, spirituality is constructed on the personal experience of finding meaning and transcendence, while religiosity involves participation in a religious organisation or adherence to religious beliefs and principles.

According to research, with the rise of alternative spiritual practices, people’s identification of themselves as “not religious” (religious nones) has also increased significantly (Woodhead, 2017). Whereas previously, “not religious” was seen as synonymous with alienation or refusal to identify with religious institutions, the focus of research has recently shifted to the study of “not religious” as an identity in its own right (Lee, 2012). Some scholars emphasise that the traditional perception of “not religious” as groups that do not identify with or believe in religion is a somewhat limited approach. However, Lee (2015) argues that the absence of religion may suggest something other than traditional forms of faith, reflecting a new trend in the contemporary religious landscape.

## Materials and methods

### 1. Scales

This study seeks to identify indicators of “spirituality” and “religiosity” as young people understand, which can lead to distorted data. To prevent potential errors, we used a mixed-methods approach combining subjective and objective measures of spirituality and religiosity. Following the Pew Research Center (2023) methodology, we asked respondents to select the statement that best reflects their attitudes toward religiosity and spirituality. (1) I consider myself a spiritual person; (2) I consider myself a religious person; (3) I consider myself both religious and spiritual; (4) spirituality is more important than religion in my life; (5) religion is more important than spirituality in my life—an objective



spirituality assessment conducted using the Spirituality Measurement Index (Pew Research Center, 2023).

Indicators of religiosity were measured using an adapted version of the Five Dimensions of Religiosity questionnaire (Pearce et al., 2017) based on the principle of understanding religion in the context of five “universal” dimensions as (1) ideological (belief in God/sacred texts/existence of heaven and hell); (2) intellectual (belief in God/sacred texts/existence of heaven and hell); (3) spirituality (belief in God/sacred texts/existence of heaven and hell); (2) intellectual (knowledge of religious canons); (3) ritual (manifestation of religiosity, which manifests itself in following religious traditions, attending religious services); (4) experiential (religious experiences, sense of awakening); (5) consequential (influence of religion on other areas of the believer).

The Bogardus scale measures the social distance between social groups and the respondent’s attitudes towards a particular type of relationship with group representatives. It also discusses the evaluative perceptions of the reasons for wearing religious attributes. To study the real indicators of religiosity, questionnaires developed independently by the authors were used.

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traditions, attending religious services); (2) intellectual (knowledge of religious canons); (3) ritual (manifestation of religiosity, which manifests itself in following religious traditions, attending religious services); (4) experiential (religious experiences, sense of awakening); (5) consequential (influence of religion on other areas of the believer).

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## 2. Statistical procedures

Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to assess the reliability of the questionnaire and to measure the level of internal consistency. Calculations were performed both for the entire questionnaire and for its individual subscales. The overall coefficient was (.937), indicating a high level of instrument reliability and consistency. The Five Dimensions of Religiosity scale had a coefficient of (.932), the Religiosity/Spirituality scale (Pew Research Center, 2023) had a coefficient of (.736), and the self-developed questionnaire had a coefficient of (.894) (Table 1).

Data were collected using Professional 3KA software (licence E-B-9979). IBM Statistics SPSS Version 30.0.0.0 (172) programme was used for data processing. Methods such as descriptive statistics, conjugation tables, chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ), correlation analysis and Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples were used in the analysis.

**Table 1** – Internal consistency of the questionnaire, Cronbach’s alpha scores

Nº	Scales	Cronbach’s Alpha	N of Items
1.	Five Dimensions of Religiosity	.932	20
2.	Religiosity/Spirituality (Pew Research Center, 2023)	.736	5
3.	Self-developed questionnaire	.894	22
4.	Internal consistency of the entire questionnaire	.937	47

## 3. Calculation of the sample population

According to the Bureau of National Statistics of the Agency for Strategic Planning and Reforms of the Republic of Kazakhstan, the number of young people as of the 3rd quarter of 2023 is 5,726,629. Within the framework of two waves of sociological

research, the general population consists of young people aged 18 to 35 who permanently reside in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan.

The sample size for the first wave of the study is 2,000 respondents. To ensure a proportional distribution of respondents by region, the sample size

was calculated according to the general population. Respondents were selected based on quotas by two main characteristics: (1) region of residence and (2) age cohorts. The territory of the sociological survey covers all regions of the Republic of Kazakhstan –

the cities of republican importance Astana, Almaty and Shymkent, 17 regional centres, as well as rural settlements (Table 2). Data collection was conducted in two languages – Kazakh and Russian, depending on the respondent's choice.

**Table 2** – Distribution of the sample population

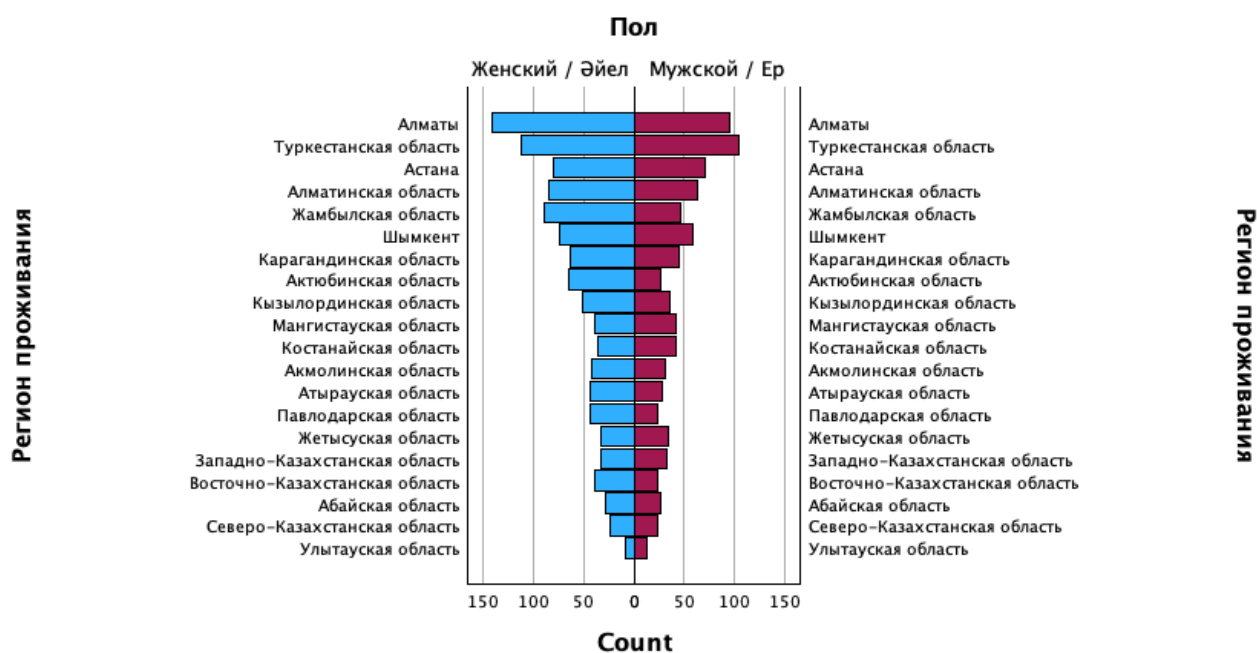
Regions	Count, people			Percentage, %	
	Total	Women	Мужчины	Женщины	Мужчины
Abay region	54	26	28	48,02	51,98
Akmola region	74	36	38	48,07	51,93
Aktobe region	93	45	48	48,73	51,27
Almaty region	149	72	77	48,40	51,60
Atyrau region	72	35	37	48,94	51,06
East Kazakhstan region	62	29	32	47,70	52,30
Almaty	239	124	115	51,98	48,02
Astana	154	79	75	51,57	48,43
Shymkent	133	68	66	50,76	49,24
Zhambyl region	124	60	64	48,41	51,59
Zhetysu region	66	32	34	48,20	51,80
West Kazakhstan region	66	32	34	48,34	51,66
Karaganda region	108	52	56	48,56	51,44
Kostanay region	77	37	40	47,89	52,11
Kyzylorda region	86	41	44	48,05	51,95
Mangistau region	81	40	41	49,12	50,88
Pavlodar region	68	33	35	48,53	51,47
North Kazakhstan region	47	22	25	47,61	52,39
Turkestan region	229	108	120	47,36	52,64
Ulytau region	21	10	11	48,36	51,64
Republic of Kazakhstan	2000	982	1018	49,08	50,92

## Results and discussion

### 1. Socio-demographic analysis

The frequency distribution of socio-demographic characteristics indicates that the study involved citizens aged 18-23 years (55.2%), 24-29 years (22.5%) and 30-35 years (22.3%). The gender com-

position of the respondents consists of 134 women (56.7%) and 866 men (43.3%) (Figure 1). In generalised form, the youth comprises 68.7% Kazakhs, 15% Russian nationality and 16.3% other ethnicities. Most youth are unmarried (67 %), while 25 % of respondents indicated that they are in a registered marriage.



Data source: authors' calculations

Figure 1 – Gender distribution of respondents by region of residence

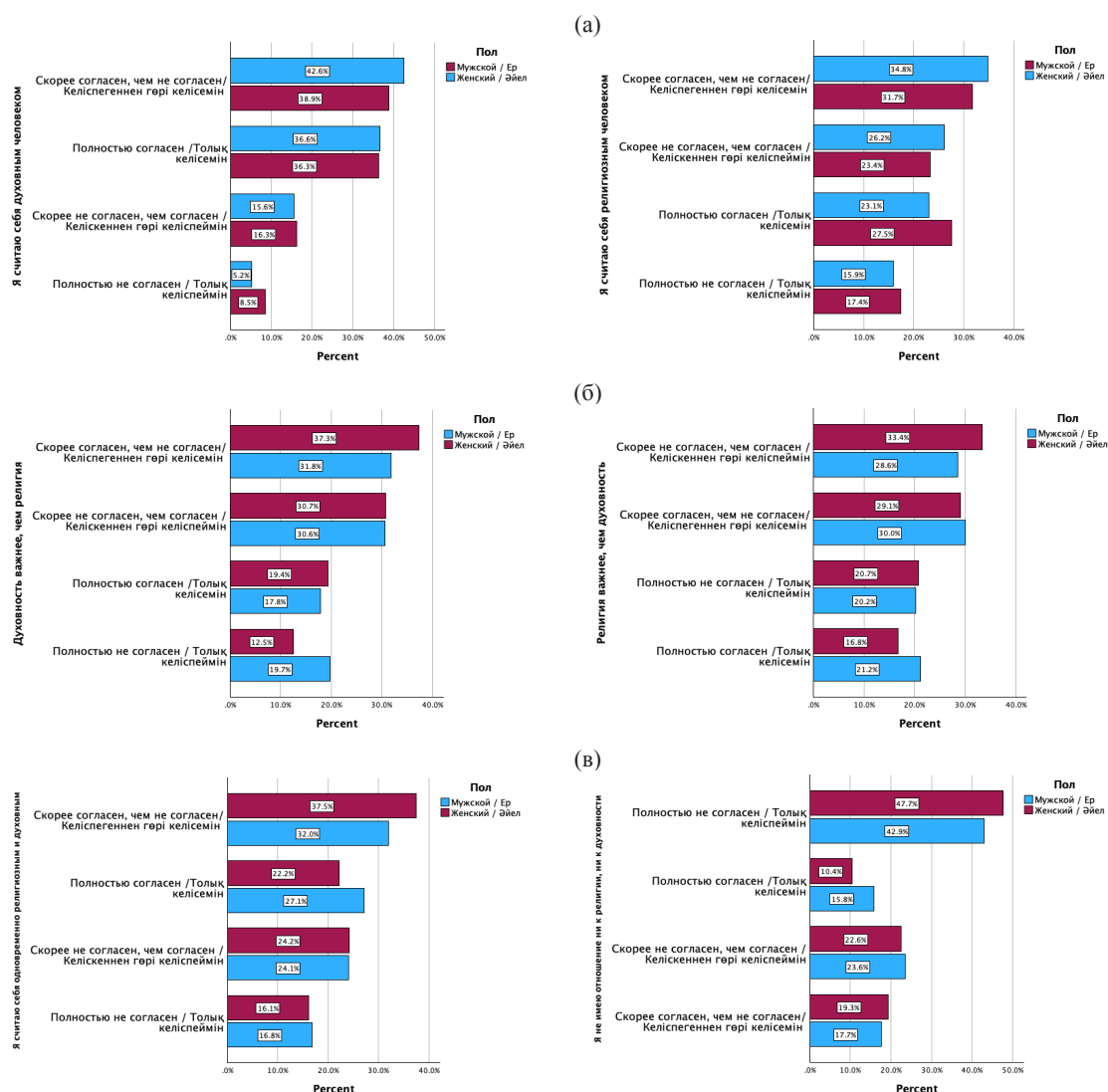
Of the young people interviewed, 47.5 % of respondents indicated that they had higher education. The primary education level accounts for 2.6% of participants, while 5.7% of respondents have primary vocational education. The proportion of participants who had not achieved “no level of education” was 0.7 %. General secondary education was achieved by 17.9 % of respondents, while “basic secondary education” had 6.4 % of respondents. Availability of “postgraduate education” was indicated by 4.0% of young people. Secondary vocational (specialised) education was reported by 10.9% of respondents, while technical and vocational education gained by 4.4%.

### 1.2. Religious and spiritual commitment

The research shows that women are more likely than men to identify as spiritual, with 36.3% of women strongly agreeing with this statement compared to 36.0% of men. In religious self-identification, men and women show similar dynamics, but men are slightly more likely to express entire agreement (27.6% / 23.7% for women). The combination

of religious and spiritual identity also finds support in both groups. 37.5 % of women “rather agree than disagree”, which is higher than the figure for men (31.5 %). At the same time, men more often express entire agreement with this statement (27.5%/ 22.7% for women).

Women more often than men reject the atheist position, and 54.5 % of women disagree entirely with it, compared to 46.7 % of men. At the same time, men more often express entire agreement with atheism (15.6 % of men/ 10.9 % of women). Women also do not show agreement with the agnostic position (49.3% of women/46.1% of men). However, men are slightly more likely to express moderate agreement with agnostic ambiguity (20.7% /18.7% of women). As for the statement “I have nothing to do with religion or spirituality”, women more often reject it (47.8% / 3.0% of men). At the same time, men more often fully agree with this position (16.0% / 10.3% of women). As a consequence, men more often support atheistic and non-religious views, while women tend to express disagreement with them (Figure 2).



Source of data: authors' calculations

**Figure 2** – Distribution of respondents' answers to the questions (a) "I consider myself spiritual"; (b) "I consider myself religious"; (c) "I consider myself both spiritual and religious" by gender

The question about the importance of religion in the respondents' lives was analysed in terms of gender components, which shows the analysis of conjugation tables using the chi-square test ( $\chi^2$ ). The results of the  $\chi^2$  test confirmed that there was no statistically significant difference in the gender distribution as the significance level was  $p=0.070$ , indicating no statistically significant relationship between gender and respondents' self-assessment of their religiosity (Table 3). Based on the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ), it is assumed that adherence to religion is independent of gender. In contrast, the

alternative hypothesis ( $H_1$ ) states that adherence to religion is gender dependent, and there are statistically significant differences in religiosity between males and females. However, since the significance level was  $p=0.070$ , which is above the prescribed threshold of 0.05, we have no reason to reject the null hypothesis. This means that no statistically significant relationship between gender and adherence to religion was found in this analysis. Based on the findings, the null hypothesis is accepted, and it is concluded that adherence to religion is independent of gender.



**Table 3** – Level of commitment and religiosity by gender, chi-square test results

		Men	Women
Level of $p < .001^*$	I consider myself highly/religiously committed (observe all religious precepts)	18.6% <sub>a</sub>	12.2% <sub>b</sub>
	I consider myself medium/religiously committed (partially observant)	44.1% <sub>a</sub>	43.5% <sub>a</sub>
	I consider myself to be weak/religiously committed (do not observe religious precepts)	18.6% <sub>a</sub>	26.6% <sub>b</sub>
	I don't consider myself religious	18.7% <sub>a</sub>	17.7% <sub>a</sub>
I consider myself $p = .070$	Totally agree	27.5%	23.2%
	Rather agree than disagree	31.8%	34.8%
	Disagree rather than agree	23.3%	26.1%
	Totally disagree.	17.4%	15.9%

## 2. Correlation analysis

Religion is a belief system and a source of support, guidance and inspiration in everyday life. For religious people, communion with God becomes an important foundation, and a relationship with the divine is a fundamental element of their worldview (Murphy et al., 2022). In many religious traditions, love for God is a central tenet that motivates believers to strengthen their attachment and devotion. This perception of God is reflected in everyday practices and beliefs (Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy, 2023). Prayer, seeking meaning through communion with the divine, and asking for help in times of need become important aspects of their lives.

Faith serves as a source of strength and hope for many believers.

Correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationship between religious beliefs, self-identity, and key aspects of religious life. Results show strong positive correlations between religiosity and statements related to feeling the presence of God – (.553), relying on Him in difficult situations – (.529), and finding meaning through prayer – (.518). Statistically significant positive correlations were also observed for respondents who identified as religious and spiritual. For example, the correlation with trusting in God is – (0.489) and with feeling His presence is – (0.512), emphasising the importance of divine support and guidance for believers.

**Table 4** – Correlation analysis of religious and spiritual self-identification, attitudes towards God and religious practices

	I feel the presence of Allah God Almighty in my life	My religious beliefs are what underpin my attitude to life	I adhere to religious principles in all areas of my life	I turn to Almighty God Allah, in cases of difficulties, with the faith of a speedy resolution to them	I turn to the Most High God Allah to find the meaning of my existence	The Most High/God/Allah accompanies the realisation of all my goals	I invoke the help of the Most High God Allah, in moments of anxiety and worry	I rely on Allah Almighty God and do not try to find a solution to the problem	I cope with my feelings and problems without the help of the Most High God Allah
I consider myself religious	.553**	.519**	.538**	.529**	.518**	.526**	.542**	.433**	-.057**
I consider myself spiritual	.334**	.324**	.301**	.315**	.333**	.309**	.324**	.250**	0,025
I consider myself to be both religious and spiritual	.512**	.476**	.485**	.490**	.489**	.486**	.498**	.409**	-.050*
I'm an atheist	-.422**	-.319**	-.248**	-.355**	-.310**	-.369**	-.377**	-.113**	.283**
I'm an agnostic	-.283**	-.241**	-.199**	-.223**	-.240**	-.279**	-.273**	-.107**	.255**

*Continuation of the table*

	I feel the presence of Allah God Almighty in my life	My religious beliefs are what underpin my attitude to life	I adhere to religious principles in all areas of my life	I turn to Almighty God Allah, in cases of difficulties, with the faith of a speedy resolution to them	I turn to the Most High God Allah to find the meaning of my existence	The Most High/God/Allah accompanies the realisation of all my goals	I invoke the help of the Most High God Allah, in moments of anxiety and worry	I rely on Allah Almighty God and do not try to find a solution to the problem	I cope with my feelings and problems without the help of the Most High God Allah
I have nothing to do with religion or spirituality	-.304**	-.259**	-.207**	-.270**	-.247**	-.298**	-.315**	-.065**	.238**
I feel the presence of Allah God Almighty in my life	1	.685**	.632**	.690**	.675**	.714**	.725**	.510**	-.103**
My religious beliefs are what underpin my attitude to life		1	.708**	.657**	.636**	.659**	.645**	.489**	-.049*
I adhere to religious principles in all areas of my life			1	.663**	.685**	.648**	.646**	.552**	-0,017
I turn to Almighty God Allah, in cases of difficulties, with the faith of a speedy resolution to them				1	.738**	.736**	.762**	.523**	-.067**
I turn to the Most High God Allah to find the meaning of my existence					1	.728**	.731**	.597**	-.074**
Almighty God Allah accompany the realisation of all my goals						1	.783**	.571**	-.123**
I invoke the help of the Most High God Allah, in moments of anxiety and worry							1	.582**	-.085**
I rely on Allah Almighty God and do not try to find a solution to the problem								1	0,041
I cope with my feelings and problems without the help of the Most High God Allah									1

Trust in God's providence and wisdom is another characteristic of religious faith. Religious people tend to turn to God in times of uncertainty, difficulty or fear, trusting that He will guide and protect them. Such trust becomes an important source of comfort and security, helping believers to cope with life's challenges. Furthermore, respondents who self-identify as atheist or agnostic demonstrate negative correlations. The findings indicate that as scepticism towards religious and spiritual beliefs increases, there is a corresponding decrease in agreement with statements regarding the divine presence and assistance. Moreover, these respondents are more likely to engage in independent problem-solving and less frequently seek guidance from a higher power (Table 4).

Spirituality or religious faith includes collective practices (participating in collective prayers and religious services) and individual practices (reading sacred texts, meditation, reflecting on inner peace, and spending time in nature). The authors conducted a correlation analysis to explore the relationship between religious self-identification, commitment level, and the frequency of both collective and individual practices. According to the results of the correlation analysis, respondents who identify themselves as religious show a significant relationship between personal attendance at places of worship-.378 and regular participation in collective prayer- (.338). As the level of commitment increases, these indicators increase (Table 5).

**Table 5** – Correlation analysis of religious and spiritual self-identification with fulfilment of religious practices

	I personally visit places of worship (mosque, church, house of worship, etc).	I virtually visit places of worship	I focus on private religious practices such as prayer, meditation, or studying scripture texts	I participate in collective prayers (Friday namaz/ Saturday Shabbat/ Sunday service, etc.).	I regularly take part in religious activities, listen to sermons and participate in seminars	I practice meditation to calm the mind and find inner peace	I spend time in nature, viewing the experience as an opportunity for spiritual enrichment	I spend time focusing on my inner world, reflecting on how I feel to better understand myself
I consider myself religious	.378**	.251**	.449**	.338**	.337**	.164**	.147**	.121**
Level of commitment	.583**	.482**	.552**	.516**	.508**	.298**	.233**	.143**
I personally visit places of worship (mosque, church, house of worship, etc).	1	.622**	.582**	.716**	.661**	.374**	.309**	.194**
I virtually visit places of worship		1	.550**	.620**	.630**	.459**	.336**	.196**
I focus on private religious practices such as prayer, meditation, or studying scripture texts			1	.595**	.607**	.462**	.368**	.310**
I participate in collective prayers (Friday namaz/ Saturday Shabbat/ Sunday service, etc.).				1	.748**	.416**	.325**	.177**
I regularly take part in religious activities, listen to sermons and participate in seminars					1	.494**	.392**	.269**
I practice meditation to calm the mind and find inner peace						1	.557**	.464**
I spend time in nature, viewing the experience as an opportunity for spiritual enrichment							1	.583**
I spend time focusing on my inner world, reflecting on how I feel to better understand myself								1

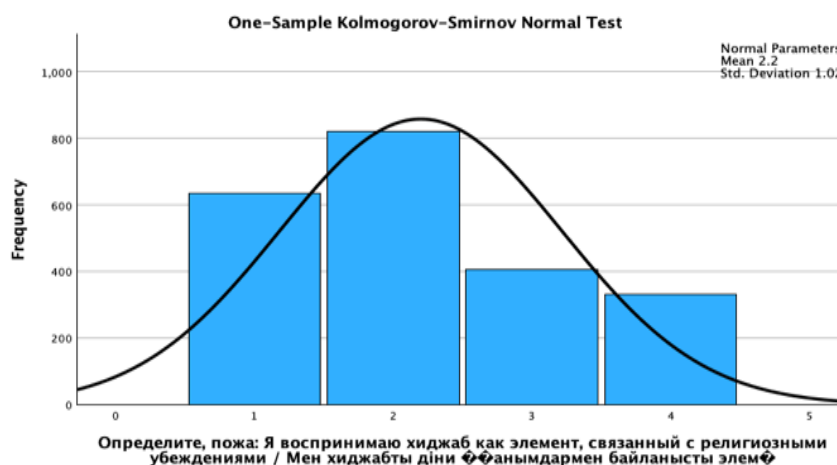
The analysis demonstrates a distinction between religious and spiritual practices, illustrating that religiosity is more associated with institutional and collective rituals, whereas spirituality is oriented towards the search for inner harmony and individual reflection. Those who self-identify as both religious and spiritual demonstrate a high correlation with meditation practices (0.409), which is higher than exclusively religious respondents (0.164) but lower than exclusively spiritual respondents (Table 5).

### 3. A comparative analysis of the perception of the hijab

In order to conduct a comparative analysis of the perceptions of women practising hijab and to identify differences by gender, level of religiosity and type of settlement, researchers initially developed a t-test to compare two independent samples. However, this method proved inapplicable because the variable related to perceptions of hijab-wearing was measured on a scale that did not correspond to the quantitative level. Consequently, the data distribution was analysed using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion. The results of this analysis demonstrated that the data was not normally distributed.

**Hypothesis Test Summary**

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. <sup>a</sup>	Decision
1	The distribution of I perceive the hijab as an element associated with religious beliefs	One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	<.001	Reject the null hypothesis.

**One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Normal Test Summary**

Total N		2000
Most Extreme Differences	Absolute	.241
	Positive	.241
	Negative	-.134
Test Statistic		.241
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test) <sup>a</sup>		<.001
Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided test) <sup>b</sup>	Sig.	<.001
	99% Confidence Interval	Lower Bound .000
		Upper Bound .000

Source of data: authors' calculations

**Figure 3** – Results of testing the variable “perception of hijab as a religious symbol” using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion (n = 2000).

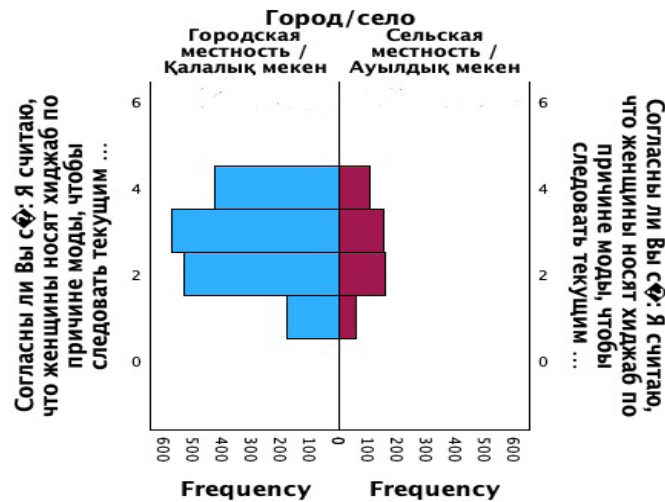
According to the null hypothesis, the data have normal distribution. However, the results of analysis using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion showed that the null hypothesis was rejected (Figure 3). Therefore, parametric methods of analysis were not applicable, and the non-para-

metric Mann-Whitney U test for independent samples was used for this variable. The results are not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ), no statistically significant differences in the perception of women who practice hijab were found between urban and rural residents.

## Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. <sup>a,b</sup>	Decision
1	The distribution of I perceive the hijab as an element associated with religious beliefs	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.323	Retain the null hypothesis.

## Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test



## Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary

Total N	2000
Mann-Whitney U	388221.000
Wilcoxon W	495174.000
Test Statistic	388221.000
Standard Error	11550.973
Standardized Test Statistic	-.988
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.323

Source of data: authors' calculations

**Figure 4** – Results of testing the variable “perception of hijab as a religious symbol” using the one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion, by settlement type (n = 2000).

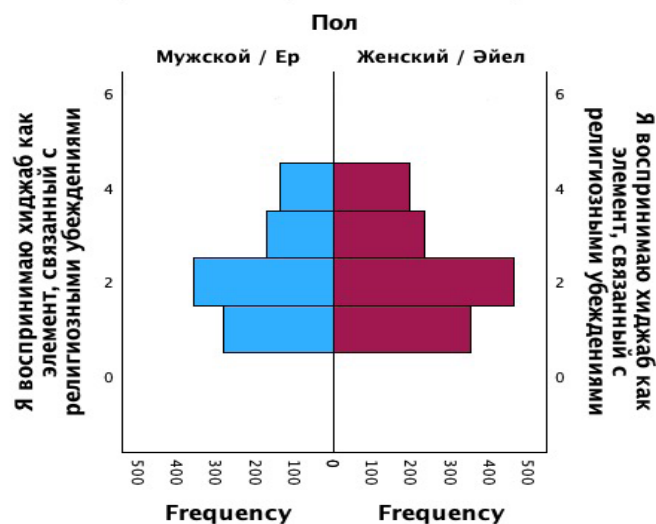
The analysis showed that asymmetric parameters were statistically insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ), i.e., there were no grounds for rejecting the null hypothesis.

There were not statistically significant differences in perceptions of women who wear the hijab between urban and rural populations (Figure 4).



**Hypothesis Test Summary**

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. <sup>a,b</sup>	Decision
1	The distribution of I perceive the hijab as an element associated with religious beliefs	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	.324	Retain the null hypothesis.

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test****Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	2000
Mann-Whitney U	605071.000
Wilcoxon W	1365832.000
Test Statistic	605071.000
Standard Error	14049.646
Standardized Test Statistic	.986
Asymptotic Sig.(2-sided test)	.324

Source of data: authors' calculations

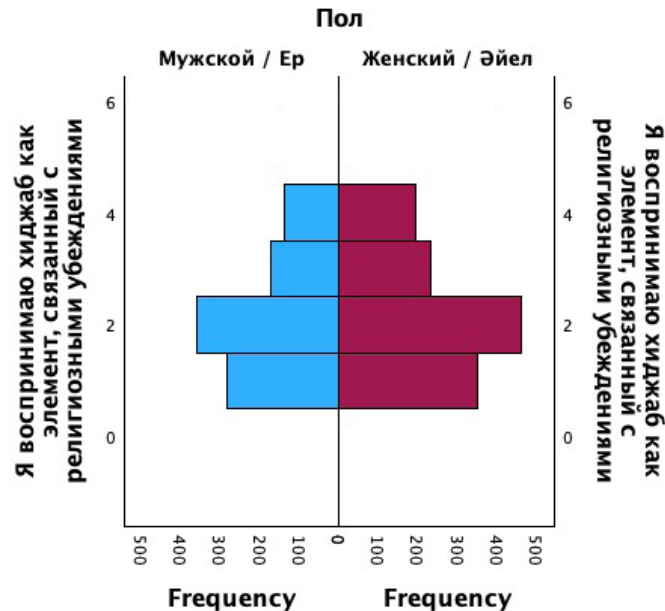
**Figure 5** – Results of testing the variable “perception of hijab as a religious symbol” using one-sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov criterion, by gender (n = 2000).

The results of analysing the perception of hijab as an element related to religious beliefs are not statistically significant ( $p > 0.05$ ). The perception of

women who wear the hijab as part of a religious symbol does not differ according to gender (Figure 5).

**Hypothesis Test Summary**

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig. <sup>a,b</sup>	Decision
1	The distribution of I perceive the hijab as an element associated with religious beliefs	Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test	<.001	Reject the null hypothesis.

**Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test****Independent-Samples Mann-Whitney U Test Summary**

Total N	902
Mann-Whitney U	115922.000
Wilcoxon W	180183.000
Test Statistic	115922.000
Standard Error	3653.622
Standardized Test Statistic	5.076
Asymptotic Sig. (2-sided test)	<.001

Source of data: authors' calculations

**Figure 6** – The results of testing the variable “perception of hijab as a religious symbol” using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov one-sample criterion, by religious/non-religious respondents (n = 902).

The analysis of results using the Mann-Whitney U test are presented in Figure 6 (Figure 6), which shows statistically significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) in the perceptions of women's hijab practices between

religious and non-religious respondents. Religious respondents were significantly more likely to interpret the hijab as part of religious practice, while non-religious respondents may attach a different meaning.

## Conclusion

Contemporary religious and spiritual practices in Kazakhstan demonstrate considerable diversity and change in approaches to faith. Traditional forms of religiosity remain important for those who remain highly committed, but people are increasingly turning to spiritual practices for personal self-knowledge and inner growth. Young people are increasingly adapting their religious practices to more individual forms that do not require membership of organised religious communities. This change is mainly due to the perception of religion as strict and tied to specific teachings. This is why the “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR) identity is becoming popular, which allows for a combination of personal spiritual practices and a search for inner balance.

The study results show no significant differences between men and women in following religious and spiritual practices. However, applying the Mann-Whitney U test revealed statistically significant differences ( $p < .001$ ) in the perceptions of women practising hijab among religious and non-religious respondents. Religious participants were more like-

ly to perceive the hijab as part of a religious practice. In contrast, non-religious respondents tended to see it as more of a cultural or social element. The  $\chi^2$  test data also confirm that factors such as environment (e.g. close contact with believers and positive examples), important life events (special meetings with religious people, personal experiences) and inner search (making sense of life and turning to faith on one's own) have a significant influence on religious self-identification.

Thus, the study's results show that in Kazakhstan, along with the preservation of traditional religious faith, alternative forms of spirituality are growing. Young people are increasingly choosing personal practices focused on inner harmony, which indicates a gradual change in the country's religious landscape.

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