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Religious people find it harder to understand the world – study

Pope Francis. Quite religious. CREDIT: SCAVUZZO/AGF/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK

By [Adam Boulton](#)

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People with religious beliefs have a poorer grasp of the physical world than their non-believing counterparts, a new study claims.

Researchers from the University of Helsinki surveyed 258 people about their beliefs, and whether they thought "there exists an all-powerful, all-knowing, loving God."

Respondents were also asked to complete tasks including matching rotated images together, and solving mechanical and physics-based problems.

The study, published in [Applied Cognitive Psychology](#), concluded that believers were less scientifically knowledgeable – evinced by their propensity to agree with statements such as “flowers are able to think” and “stones feel the cold”. They were also more likely to struggle with solving physical tasks.

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Researchers claim their results show that supernatural beliefs correlated with “low systemizing, poor intuitive physics skills, poor mechanical ability, poor mental rotation, low school grades in mathematics and physics, poor common knowledge about physical and biological phenomena, intuitive and analytical thinking styles, and in particular, with assigning mentality to non-mental phenomena.”

Study authors Marjaana Lindeman and Annika Svedholm-Häkkinen suggest that, when people don’t understand the physical world, they tend to apply human characteristics to the wider universe, “resulting in belief in demons, gods, and other supernatural phenomena”.


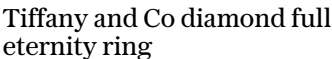


A 2008 [survey](#) by researchers at Ulster University concluded that people with higher IQs were less likely to believe in God.

Psychology professor Richard Lynn told the Times Higher Education magazine: "Why should fewer academics believe in God than the general population? I believe it is simply a matter of the IQ. Academics have higher IQs than the general population. Several Gallup poll studies of the general population have shown that those with higher IQs tend not to believe in God."

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