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To cite this article: Virgo Handojo, Yuspendi & Timothy A. Sisemore (2021): Attachment style, religiosity, and well-being among Indonesian Christians, Journal of Prevention & Intervention in the Community, DOI: [10.1080/10852352.2021.1924597](https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2021.1924597)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10852352.2021.1924597>



Published online: 31 May 2021.



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Attachment style, religiosity, and well-being among Indonesian Christians

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ABSTRACT

This study examines attachment styles, religiosity as measured by religious coping, and church activities, for their possible impact on feelings of well-being in an Indonesian Christian community. This cross-sectional study was conducted on both purposive and snowball samples of 264 Christians from Bandung and Semarang, Indonesia. The study hypothesized that a more positive Self-Other Model of attachment, greater positive religious coping, and higher church involvement would predict greater well-being as measured by flourishing/eudaimonic, affective, and subjective well-being scales. Pearson correlation and multiple regression methods were used to analyze data. Results indicated that 15% of the total variance in affective well-being is attributable to positive self-model attachment, positive religious coping, and higher subjective religiosity/spirituality. The study also found that 9.9% of the total variance in flourishing or eudaimonic well-being is counted for the self-model. However, neither predictor was correlated to hedonistic or subjective well-being. Greater religiosity, as measured through the church activities, was also not correlated with greater measures in the three types of well-being. This study concluded that the predictive power of religiosity such as church activities and attachment to well-being may depend on the characteristics of the culture.

KEYWORDS

Attachment style; Christians; culture; Indonesia; religious coping; well-being

One of the most basic questions people seek to answer is what is it that makes one happy. While this has been extensively researched in the West (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999; Diener, 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2001), it is not as well documented in other parts of the world. It is also unclear whether several variables that have demonstrated a relationship to happiness in the West also predict it in other parts of the world. The current study proposes to address these gaps in the literature.

To begin, one must ask what is happiness, or well-being. The literature suggests there are two major approaches to the empirical inquiry of well-being. The first is hedonism (Kahneman, Diener, & Schwarz, 1999),

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claiming that well-being consists of desire to secure pleasure and to avoid pain. It has been known as subjective well-being, operationalized cognitively in terms of satisfaction with different domains of life and affectively by positive or balance emotions. The second is eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2008; Waterman et al., 2010), arguing that well-being is more than just pleasure and positive feelings. Instead, well-being lies in meaning and purpose, virtue and strength, close relationships and positive human functioning. These derive from different understandings about human nature and the highest intrinsic good in life. The present study examines both approaches and their relationships to attachment, religious activities, subjective religiosity/spirituality, and religious coping within a Christian Indonesian community.

Culture and well-being

Most of the scientific work on well-being has been in the West. Yet, culture shapes the thoughts, behaviors, and psychological states of individuals and poses a challenge to psychological research that does not take culture into consideration. Well-being is no exception. Significant differences exist between the understanding of well-being of Easterners and Westerners. For instance, Eastern cultures tend to be more collectivistic, Western more individualistic (Triandis, 1995). In Western culture, the dominant view of happiness is basically hedonistic (Christopher & Hickinbottom, 2008; Joshanloo, 2013; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). The Western eudaimonic theory of happiness that focuses on human functioning is also conceptualized in terms of individualistic characteristics such as self-esteem, autonomy, mastery in managing the environment, meaning, and personal enjoyment of life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff, 1989; Waterman et al., 2010).

Indonesians cope with the problems of life in general and happiness in particular by integrating their cultural religious values with individual spirituality and religion (Geertz, 1976). Indonesian law recognizes Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Confucianism as the official religions. Unlike in the West, the Eastern cultures tend to focus on collectivism, harmony, tolerance and interrelationships (Lu & Gilmour, 2004, Triandis, 1995). They are searching more for emotional balance and inner peace as a way of pursuing happiness than does hedonism (Lee, Lin, Huang, & Fredrickson, 2013). Semarang is the capitol of the Javanese culture, the main culture of Central Java. Bandung is the capitol of the Sundanese, the main culture of West Java. Predominantly both cultures profess Islam as their organized religion. However, in daily life they assimilate their monotheistic religion into their cultures. Geertz (1976) considers them as Islam *Abangan* or Red Islam. They practice a much more syncretic

form of Islam than do the Orthodox Santri. They believe that happiness and satisfaction do not come only from this worldly life, but only can be experienced through the state of no-self or a mystical union transcending everyday life. By reattaching the individual to God, maintaining harmonious relationship with others, and cultivating their spiritual potential, the Javanese believe that their life can be transformed and they can achieve their ultimate happiness. Other less common religions in Indonesia, such as Christianity, also tend to practice syncretism (Währisch-Oblau, 2018). They are basically monotheists, but also believe in local gods, search for blessing from the local saints, and practice witchcraft. Christian Indonesians, too, tend to dismiss external indicators or religion and focus more on inner happiness, emotional balance, and spiritual maturity—in contrast to more Western ideas of happiness built on external things such as possessions and pleasant experiences.

For example, Hinduism pursues a happiness of accumulating virtues and righteousness rather than hedonism (Shamasundar, 2008). Confucianism stresses virtues, inner and social harmony in the family, work, and community in pursuing happiness (Wang, 2020). Kitayama, Duffy, and Uchida (2007) argue that Eastern cultures emphasize interpersonal harmony and adjustment as a way to reach a sense of well-being by promoting mutual sympathy and harmony with others and the whole cosmos. Hofstede (1986, 2011) in his 4-D model of cultural differences among societies, characterizes Indonesian culture in terms of *large power-distance, low individualism and weak uncertainty, avoidance and femininity*. In dealing with daily life they believe in existential equality, tolerance toward ambiguity and chaos, and self-control. They admire friendliness and mutual solidarity. Relative to other nations, they score high on subjective health and well-being.

In short, Indonesians tend to conceptualize their happiness and well-being within the framework of integrating religion, social harmony, and spiritual values rather than focusing on Western concepts of self-actualization, materialism, positivism, and rationalism.

Attachment and well-being

Many variables have been proposed as contributing to the construct of well-being, attachment being one. Homan (2018) found not only were attachment anxiety and avoidance inversely related to eudemonic well-being among older adults, but this was mediated by the degree of self-compassion within subjects. Some studies (e.g., Brandão et al., 2020) show a relationship between attachment and well-being in romantic relationships. More to the present study, attachment to God in particular (Keefer & Brown, 2018) predicts well-being. Even religious community contributes to

well-being beyond the role of mere social support (Freeze, 2017). Thus attachment, including religious attachment, appears to be more related to communalism than individualism.

The relationship between attachment and well-being has also been explored in Eastern cultures, such as Guo's (2019) study in China that found young adults from intact families had higher rates of attachment and subjective well-being (using the Chinese version of the Satisfaction with Life Scale). These studies indicate the need to examine all factors together in one research design.

Religious coping, church activities and well-being

Davis, Hook, McAnnally-Linz, Choe, and Placeres (2017) define religion as "adherence to a belief system and practices associated with a tradition and community in which there is agreement about what is believed and practiced" (p. 243). They define spirituality in terms of general feeling of closeness and connectedness to the Sacred. In the context of Indonesian law and history we may argue that Indonesians would experience spirituality through their religion. This puts them into the common group of those who claim to be both religious and spiritual (Sisemore, 2016). In looking at church activities in this study, we focus more on religion through subjective spirituality.

For Indonesians, social harmony, religiosity and spirituality are at the center of their well-being. One might suspect, then, that religion would positively correlate with well-being. Yet, one can use religion in healthy and unhealthy ways to cope with life. Pargament, Falb, Ano, and Wachholtz (2013) looked closely at this in developing the constructs of religious coping as positive or negative, the latter more often termed religious struggle (e.g., Exline & Rose, 2013). Pargament et al. (2013, p. 563) summarize the difference, "Positive religious coping strategies reflect a secure relationship with God and a sense of spiritual connectedness with others. Negative religious coping methods reflect a struggle within oneself, with others, or with God around sacred matters." Sisemore (2016) notes numerous health and mental health benefits to positive religious coping, though there are certainly adverse consequences for negative religious coping or spiritual coping if not resolved. In relation to the present study, Krok (2015) has found there is a relationship between positive religious coping and well-being, and one mediator in that is meaning in life. Religion, then, can be a positive factor in well-being, depending on whether it is used in positive or negative ways to cope with life's challenges.

Many researchers observe that participation in religious activities (such as prayer) and one's relationship with God enhance happiness and

well-being (Ferriss, 2002; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990). However, the positive relationship between happiness and religious practices is not a universal one. For example, a study in Slovakia revealed that spirituality correlated positively with self-rated health, health complaints, and life satisfaction but a moderating role of religiosity was not confirmed (Veselska et al., 2018).

In the current study we consider the relationship among these variables of attachment, subjective religiosity/spirituality, and religious coping (particularly as participation in a church context). While there is no overarching theory to predict these relationships, we argue that religious faith and practice—particularly in community—promote well-being particularly when used to cope positively with adversity. Here, a communal notion of faith and culture offer more support to well-being in the eudaimonic sense (and less so the hedonistic sense). Strong attachment ties that include the religious community specifically may promote this, particularly in a culture that is more communal such as Indonesia. In doing so, we hope to draw together some of these important strands in our understanding of well-being and move toward a more comprehensive view of how it relates to psychological constructs and social variables. Specifically, based on the literature reviews above, we hypothesize that greater positive self and other attachment model, greater positive religious coping, religiosity and spirituality predict greater well-being.

Method

Participants

For this study, we surveyed 264 (104 males, 160 females) participants who identified themselves as Christian (116 singles, 148 married). The mean age was 30.55 years ($SD = 12.05$). The sample was relatively educated with 96.6% (mean = 3.58, $SD = .748$) reporting completing high school, some college, or a bachelor's degree. Over sixty percent (61.7%) consider themselves as middle class and 81.6% (mean = 2.02, $SD = .51$) felt that their income are just enough or more than their needs. The majority of participants (64%) identified themselves as Javanese (64), Chinese (51), or Batak people (56). The remaining identified themselves as Sunda (16), Manado (16) and others (61).

Procedures

This study was part of a larger project examining love, spirituality, and well-being in Indonesia. Participants were recruited via flyers, announcements, and through personal contacts from schools, churches, community

groups, businesses, and nonprofit organizations in two urban cities: Bandung and Semarang. The study was developed by the first author, and approved by the institutional review boards from both institutions where authors are affiliated. Participants provided their consent by completing packets comprising an information sheet, an informed Consent Sheet, and the questionnaire. Questionnaires were returned to the research team by mail or in person.

Instruments

Attachment

The Attachment Style Questionnaire-Short Form (ASQ-SF; Chui & Leung, 2016) is a 15-item self-report questionnaire using a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all like me) to 6 (very much like me). ASQ-SF consists of four subscales, namely secure (e.g., “I feel at ease in intimate relationships”), fearful avoidant (e.g., “I would like to be open to others, but I feel I can’t trust other people”), preoccupied (e.g., “I often wonder whether people like me”), and dismissing (e.g., “It is important to me to be independent”). The internal consistencies of each sub-scale for this study were the following: secured: .672, fearful: .826, dismissing: .538, and preoccupied: .462. The internal working model of self-dimension was measured by summing the ratings of the two attachment prototypes with positive self-models (secure and dismissing) and subtracting the ratings of the two prototypes with negative self-models (preoccupied and fearful avoidant). The internal working model of other-dimension was measured by summing the ratings of the two attachment prototypes with positive other-models (secure and preoccupied) and subtracting the ratings of the two prototypes with negative other-models (dismissing and fearful avoidant).

Religiosity and spirituality

Religiosity was measured by both church attendance (e.g., “How often do you attend church, mosque, temple, or other religious meetings?”) and church activities (e.g., “How often do you spend time in private religious activities, such as prayer, meditation or Bible or Koran study?”). The church attendance uses responses ranging on the 6-point Likert-type scales from “never” to “more than once a week,” and the church activities uses responses ranging on the 6-point Likert-type scales from “rarely or never” to “more than once a day.” To measure subjective spirituality, the following questions were used: “Are you religious?” with responses ranging on the 7-point scale from “not at all” to “extremely religious.”

Religious coping

The Brief RCOPE is a 14-item measure of positive and religious coping with major life (Pargament, Feuille, & Burdzy, 2011). Positive religious coping (e.g., “When bad things happen to me, I seek God’s love and care”) measure the degree of a secure relationship with God, a spiritual connectedness with others, and a benevolent world view. Negative religious coping (e.g., “When bad things happen to me, I question the power of God”) reflect underlying spiritual struggles with self, with others, and with God. Cronbach’s α values for positive religious coping was .828 and negative was .815.

Flourishing or eudaimonic scale (FS)

The construct was developed to measure human positive functioning (i.e., eudaimonia). The construct measured by averaging of the flourishing scale (Diener et al., 2010). The FS measures eudaimonia well-being using eight items (e.g., “I lead a purposeful and meaningful life”) and a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from (1) strongly disagree to (7) strongly agree. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient obtained for the FS was high ($\alpha = 0.87$) (Diener et al., 2010). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this study was .857.

Affective well-being

The scales measure balance emotion or affective well-being using six positive feelings and six negative feelings (Diener et al., 2010). For both scales, the three of the items are general (e.g., positive, negative) and three per subscale are more specific (e.g., joyful, sad). The two scores were combined to create a balance score by subtracting the negative score from the positive score. The items are scored on a 5-point Likert-type scales (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). The results balance scores can range from -24 (unhappiest possible) to 24 (highest affect balance possible). The Cronbach’s alpha coefficient for this study was .443.

Subjective or hedonistic well-being

Subjective well-being was measured by requesting participants to complete the Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Lepper, 1999). The respondents shared their happiness levels by answering questions such as, “Compared with most of my peers, I consider myself:” with anchors of “less happy” and “more happy.” This four-item measure used 7-point Likert scales and had a reliability score of .704.

Table 1. Mean and Standard Deviations among Variables.

	Predictors	Mean	SD
Religiosity	Church Attendance	5.18	.62
	Church Activities	3.53	1.42
	Subjective Religiosity/Spirituality	4.53	1.27
	Positive Coping Religious	37.27	15.02
	Negative Coping Religious	21.95	3.35
Attachment style	Self-Model	7.57	1.77
	Others-Model	4.89	1.53
Well-beings	Affective Well-being	8.46	7.53
	Flourishing/Eudaimonic well-being	43.39	7.69
	Subjective/Hedonistic Well-being	5.10	1.07

N = 264.

Analytic procedure

Before doing analysis all variables were screened for missing values and statistical violations. Nine cases were dropped for missing data, remaining in a sample size of 255. The data were analyzed using SPSS to test the contribution of attachment styles, religious coping, religiosity (church attendance and church activities), and subjective religiosity/spirituality to well-beings. Means and standard deviations for the variables are presented in Table 1.

Prior to test the hypotheses, Pearson's correlations among variables were tested. Hypotheses were tested using simultaneous multiple regression, where all of the contributing factors were entered into the regression analysis at the same time to find the impact on three different concepts of well-being, namely flourishing or eudaimonic, affective and subjective well-being.

Results

Preliminary analysis

Pearson correlations between independent and dependent variables are presented in Table 2. There were several significant relations between self-model of attachment and components of religiosity across the dependent variables, except with the hedonistic or subjective well-being. There were no significant relations between church or religious activities with all models of well-being.

Main analysis

The study seeks to examine whether greater positive self and other attachment model, greater positive religious coping, religiosity and spirituality predict greater well-being. To test the hypothesis a standard multiple

Table 2. Pearson correlation between the independence and dependence variables.

Predictors		r1	r2	r3
Religiosity	Church Attendance	.049	.048	.024
	Church Activities	.066	.036	.048
	Subj. Religiosity/Spirituality	.275***	.154**	.096
	Positive Religious Coping	.215***	.148**	.091
	Negative Religious Coping	-.152**	.073	-.035
Attachment style	Self-Model	.273***	.256***	.041
	Others-Model	.079	.076	.038

N = 264. Significance level are indicated by * $p < .5$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. Pearson correlation r1 = Affective Well-being, r2 = Flourishing r3 = Subjective Well-Being.

Table 3. Multiple regression analyses predicting to Flourishing, Affective, and Subjective Well-Being.

Predictors		β1	β2	β3
Religiosity	Church Attendance	.007	.042	.016
	Church Activities	.019	.116	.085
	Subj. Religiosity/Spirituality	.193**	.097	.110
	Positive Religious Coping	.148**	.089	.073
	Negative Religious Coping	-.027	-.042	-.035
Attachment style	Self-Model	.206***	.223***	.071
	Others-Model	.069	.065	.032
	R ²	.150***	.099***	.027
	R	.387***	.315***	.164

N = 264. Significance level are indicated by * $p < .5$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$. β1 = Affective Well-being, β2 = Flourishing or Eudaimonic Well-being and β3 = Subjective or hedonistic Well-Being.

regression analysis was conducted. Results on Table 3 showed as the following:

Effect on affective well-being

The first model was significant, accounting for 15% of the variance, $F(7, 256) = 6.438, p < .000, R^2 = .150$ to be significant predictors of Affective well-being. The model also shows that attachment: Self-Model ($t = 3.45, p < .001$), positive religious coping ($t = 2.47, p < .014$), and subjective religiosity/spirituality ($t = 2.91, p < .004$) were found to be significant predictors of affective well-being. Thus, greater secure attachment, greater positive religious coping, and greater subjective religiosity relate to greater emotional balance of well-being. Other independent variables may have contributing effects, but statistically are not significant.

Effect on flourishing (eudaimonic well-being)

The second model was significant, accounting for 9.9% of the variance, $F(7, 256) = 4.02, p < .000, R^2 = .099$ to be significant predictors of Flourishing, the eudemonic well-being. However, only Self-Model ($t = .223, p < .000$) was found to be significant predictor of flourishing scales. Thus, greater positive Model of Self that predict to greater expression of

human flourishing or eudaimonic well-being, which partially supported our hypotheses.

Effect on subjective well-being (hedonistic well-being)

The third model was not significant, accounting for only 2.7% of the variance, $F(7, 256) = 1.02$, $p < .420$, $R^2 = .027$ to be predictors of Subjective or hedonistic well-being. In this case our hypotheses were not confirmed.

Discussion

The study predicted that participants with greater secure attachment, positive religious coping, and participation in church activities would report a better well-being as measured by Affective well-being scales, Flourishing or Eudaimonic scales and Subjective well-being or hedonistic well-being. We also argue that religiosity would promote well-being particularly when used to cope positively with adversity. In the Indonesian cultural context, religiosity and culture offer more support to well-being in the eudaimonic sense (and less so the hedonistic sense). The study found the following:

First, in relation to affective well-being, results indicated that people with a greater positive Self-Model, greater positive spiritual coping, and greater subjective spirituality predicted greater affective well-being. This model confirmed and replicated previous studies (Collins, 1996; Simpson, Rholes, & Nelligan, 1992) which found that adults were likely to respond to stressful and social ambiguous events consistent with their existing attachment styles. For example, Yuspendi et al. (2018) found that among Indonesians, only the Self-Model attachment plays a critical role in dealing with stressful and social ambiguous relationships such as domestic violence and separation with significant others. For many Indonesians, maintaining social harmony (Williams, 1991), regulating emotions in social relationships (van Beek & Min, 1987), and having spirituality (Geertz, 1976) are significant factors to their well-being. These findings partially confirmed the hypotheses that people who consider themselves worthy and loveable (positive Self-Model) have a greater ability to adjust and maintain their harmonious relationships with others as opposed to the negative Self-Model. Therefore, having a positive Self-Model, greater religiosity (religious coping and subjective spirituality) predicts greater affective well-being.

Second, the present study found that flourishing or eudaimonic well-being was only predicted by the positive attachment self-model but not by the contribution of religiosity as indicated by religious practices, subjective spirituality, and positive religious coping. The fact that religiosity did not predict eudaimonic well-being in the Indonesian context may not surprising. Prior research found that religiosity and spirituality are positively

correlated with well-being (Ferriss, 2002; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990). However the relationships were complex and not universally confirmed (Veselska et al., 2018). Clearly, we need further study to uncover this complex relationship among attachment, religiosity, and culture.

Third, in relation to hedonistic or subjective well-being, our hypotheses were not confirmed. The findings seem do not support prior study who found that there was a positive correlation between religiosity as measured by religious activities and subjective well-being or happiness (Hackney & Sanders, 2003). Religiosity is very important for Indonesians. However, the hedonistic self-expression in the Indonesian context is not encouraged. Clearly, we need further study in relation to hedonistic well-being and religiosity in the context of collectivist culture.

The comparison among the three models provide insights from which it may be concluded that affective well-being may be predicted by the attachment self-model, spirituality, and religious coping. However, the eudaimonic and the cognitive subjective aspect of well-being are reported only by the positive attachment self-model. The findings also revealed that church or religious activities have no significant predictive power on any models of well-being. The study may confirm the observation of Veselska et al. (2018) studies. This Slovakian study revealed that there is a positive correlation between subjective spirituality and well-being, but a moderating role of religiosity was not confirmed. Diener et al. (2010) also argued that the predictive power of religiosity to well-being is not a simple one. Though they found a slightly higher association between religiosity and well-being, they argued that the correlations were mediated by difficult life circumstances and societal and psychological factors such as social support, feeling respected, and meaning of life. In this Indonesian study, it is plausible that church activities provide social and psychological support that can become a protective factor from the negative effects of difficult circumstances; however the effects on well-being, statistically were not significant. Hofstede (1986) categorized Indonesian culture as *large power-distance, low individualism, and weak uncertainty avoidance feminine*. These cultures often admire social hierarchy and mutual solidarity. They are accustomed and more tolerance to live with chaotic circumstances. In this cultural context, people seem to be able to have a greater meaning of life, social support, and regulating emotion without solely depending on the church or a religious organization.

Limitations

The present study is a correlation study that seeks to understand the relationship between attachment and some religious variables and their

predictive affect on well-being. Participants were recruited at a single point in time. Therefore, the study serves only to describe or predict behavior, but not to explain or draw a causal conclusion. Longitudinal design and analysis may overcome this issue. Generalizing the findings to other populations should be done cautiously.

Participants of the study were recruited from a Christian community in Semarang and Bandung, Indonesia. They predominantly identified themselves as Javanese, Chinese, or Batak. We have to be cautious to generalize the results beyond those populations. Further study is needed to assess the extent to which these findings can be applied to other cultures or religions. The findings that there is no significant correlation between religious activities and well-being might not emerge in cultures or contexts that have different values and social structures.

Conclusion

For hundreds of years, Indonesian Christian communities have been living side by side with other majority religions. As a minority, religious group, Christian churches have become a safe haven where people seek spiritual well-being, psychological comfort, and social refuge. This study attempts to reveal the dynamic relationship of well-being to attachment self-other models, religiosity, and spirituality through the lens of Indonesian culture. Unlike the other studies that revealed religious people tend to report higher well-being (Koenig & Larson, 2001), the Christian church in Indonesia revealed a unique relationship between psychological health and church activities and other component of religiosity. In Indonesia, religiosity was not directly predicted with greater affective, eudaimonic, or subjective well-being. Their relationships are complex and need further study. However, the positive secured self-model as described in the “love ... thy neighbour as thyself” model (King James Bible, 2017, Luke 10:27), has a strong predictive power on at least two types of well-being, the emotional and eudaimonic. The findings imply that in order to enhance people’s well-being, the Christian community in Indonesia should consider adding socio and psychological educational components as a part of their ministries in addition to their regular church activities. The findings also imply that there are socio-cultural and contextual factors which future studies can explore to clarify the relationship between love, religiosity, and well-being.

Acknowledgments

Data collection and preliminary analysis were sponsored by the Maranatha Christian University, School of Psychology, Indonesia and California Baptist University, College of Behavioral and Social Sciences, USA. Portions of these findings were presented as a Live

Webinar organized by Global Anabaptist Health Network of Mennonite World Conference on November 18, 2020. We have no conflicts of interest to disclose.

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