



# Contextual Influence on the Development of Children's Religious Belief, Emotion, and Practice

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# Research background



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## Religious development:

**promotive and protective effect on development**

(e.g., Cheung & Yeung, 2011; King & Boyatzis, 2015; King, Ramos, & Clardy, 2013)

**decrease from adolescence to early adulthood**

(e.g., Hayward & Krause, 2013; Starbuck, 1901; Van Tuyl, 1938)

## Religious dimensions

**belief: importance/salience** (e.g., Desmond et al., 2010; Schwadel, 2016)

**emotion: religious emotion** (e.g., Emmons, 2005)

**practice: attendance, pray** (e.g., Hardy et al., 2011; Schwadel, 2016, 2017)

## Contextual influence (e.g., Boyatzis, 2009; Schwartz, 2006)

**family, church, school, peer**

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# The Tufts Character and Merit Project



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Institute for Applied Research  
in Youth Development

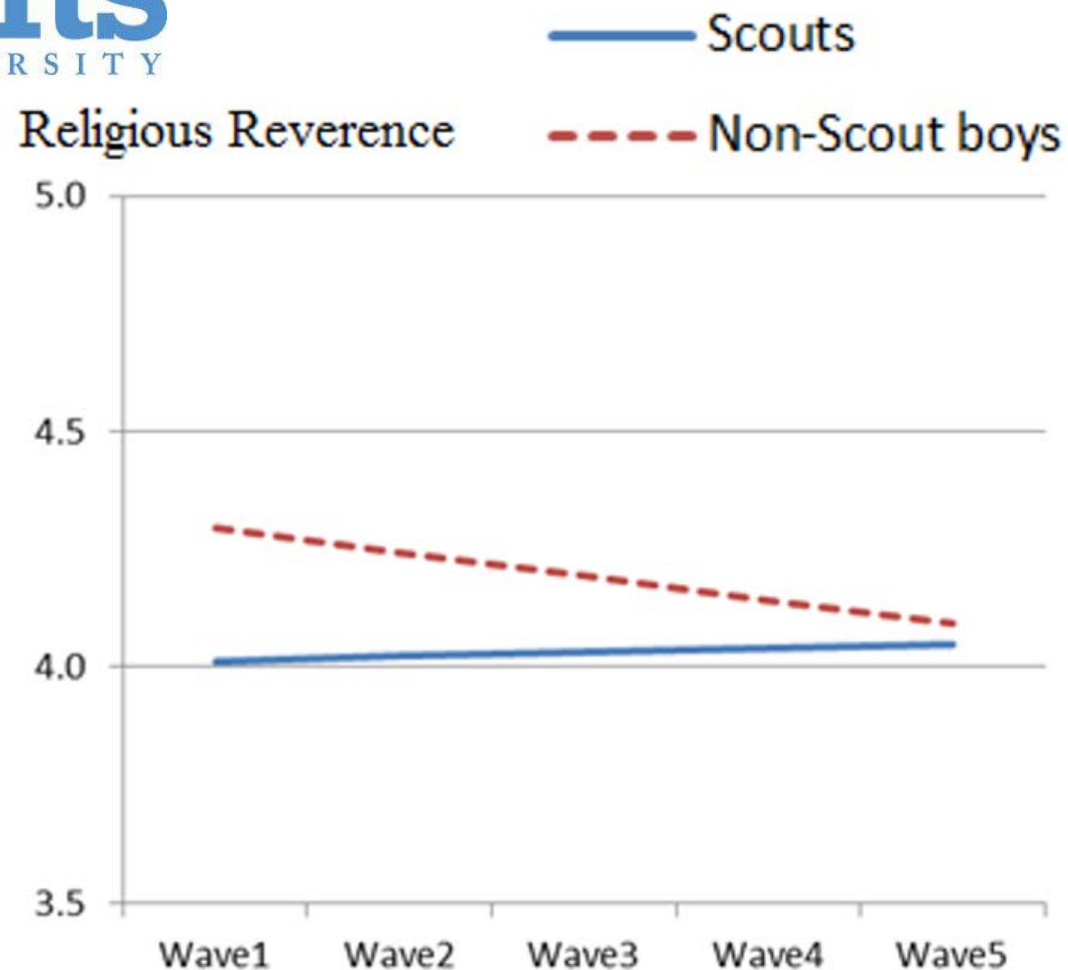
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**“Success is a process of continually seeking answers to new questions.”  
-Sir John Templeton**

# Research Question



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- **What religious dimensions develop**  
in
  - **what ways**  
among
  - **what groups of children**  
in
  - **what developmental contexts?**
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# Participants: 6-11 years old children



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| <b>Groups of Children</b>                     | <b>#</b>    | <b><i>Age at Wave 1</i></b> | <b><i>SD</i></b> |
|-----------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------|------------------|
| <b>Scouts not at church</b>                   | <b>334</b>  | <b>8.57</b>                 | <b>1.25</b>      |
| <b>Scouts at church</b>                       | <b>1064</b> | <b>8.59</b>                 | <b>1.30</b>      |
| <b>Non-Scout boys at non-religious school</b> | <b>221</b>  | <b>9.06</b>                 | <b>1.44</b>      |
| <b>Non-Scout boys at religious school</b>     | <b>104</b>  | <b>9.06</b>                 | <b>1.41</b>      |
| <b>Girls at non-religious schools</b>         | <b>320</b>  | <b>9.00</b>                 | <b>1.52</b>      |
| <b>Girls at religious schools</b>             | <b>75</b>   | <b>9.25</b>                 | <b>1.35</b>      |
| <b>Total sample size</b>                      | <b>2118</b> | <b>8.75</b>                 | <b>1.36</b>      |

# Method



Measure: three items on religiosity

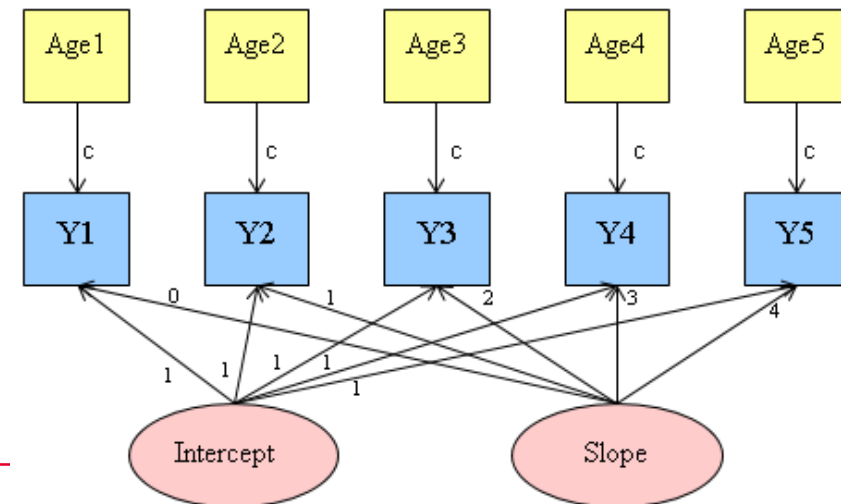
(from the Assessment of Character in Children and Early Adolescents, ACCEA, Wang, Hilliard, Hershberg, Bowers, Chase, ... et al, 2015)

- Q1: I like to read or listen to stories from my religion.
- Q2: I pray.
- Q3: I believe in God.

Data collection: every 6 months for five times (2.5 years)

Analysis:

- Multi-group growth curve



# Results



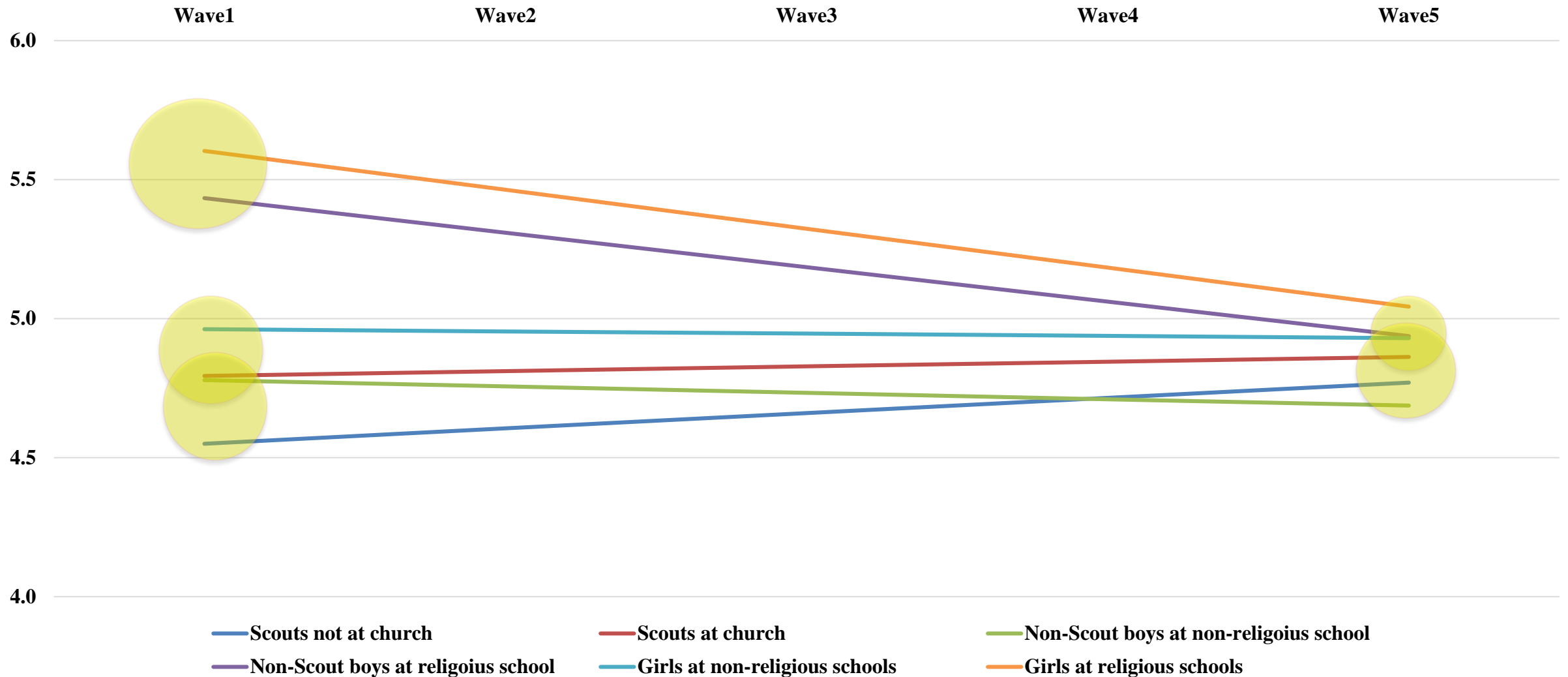
| Groups of children                                      | Items                     | Intercept | Slope | p of slope | Effect size of change from Wave 1 to Wave 5 |
|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|-------|------------|---------------------------------------------|
| Scouts not at church<br>(N = 334)                       | I like religious stories. | 4.550     | .055  | .052       | .16                                         |
|                                                         | I pray.                   | 3.528     | .038  | .246       | .10                                         |
|                                                         | I believe in God.         | 4.704     | .010  | .623       | .04                                         |
| Scouts at church<br>(N = 1064)                          | I like religious stories. | 4.794     | .017  | .355       | .05                                         |
|                                                         | I pray.                   | 3.724     | .022  | .253       | .06                                         |
|                                                         | I believe in God.         | 4.852     | -.026 | .027       | -.12                                        |
| Non-Scout boys at<br>non-religious schools<br>(N = 221) | I like religious stories. | 4.779     | -.023 | .562       | -.07                                        |
|                                                         | I pray.                   | 3.875     | -.027 | .461       | -.07                                        |
|                                                         | I believe in God.         | 4.826     | -.008 | .732       | -.04                                        |
| Non-Scout boys at<br>religious school<br>(N = 104)      | I like religious stories. | 5.433     | -.124 | .010       | -.41                                        |
|                                                         | I pray.                   | 4.494     | -.120 | .009       | -.40                                        |
|                                                         | I believe in God.         | 5.035     | -.039 | .145       | -.24                                        |
| Girls at non-religious<br>schools<br>(N = 320)          | I like religious stories. | 4.962     | -.008 | .767       | -.03                                        |
|                                                         | I pray.                   | 3.942     | .000  | .995       | .00                                         |
|                                                         | I believe in God.         | 4.861     | -.002 | .929       | -.01                                        |
| Girls at religious<br>schools<br>(N = 75)               | I like religious stories. | 5.603     | -.140 | .007       | -.46                                        |
|                                                         | I pray.                   | 4.618     | -.120 | .013       | -.41                                        |
|                                                         | I believe in God.         | 5.081     | -.041 | .164       | -.25                                        |



# Results



I like stories from my religion.

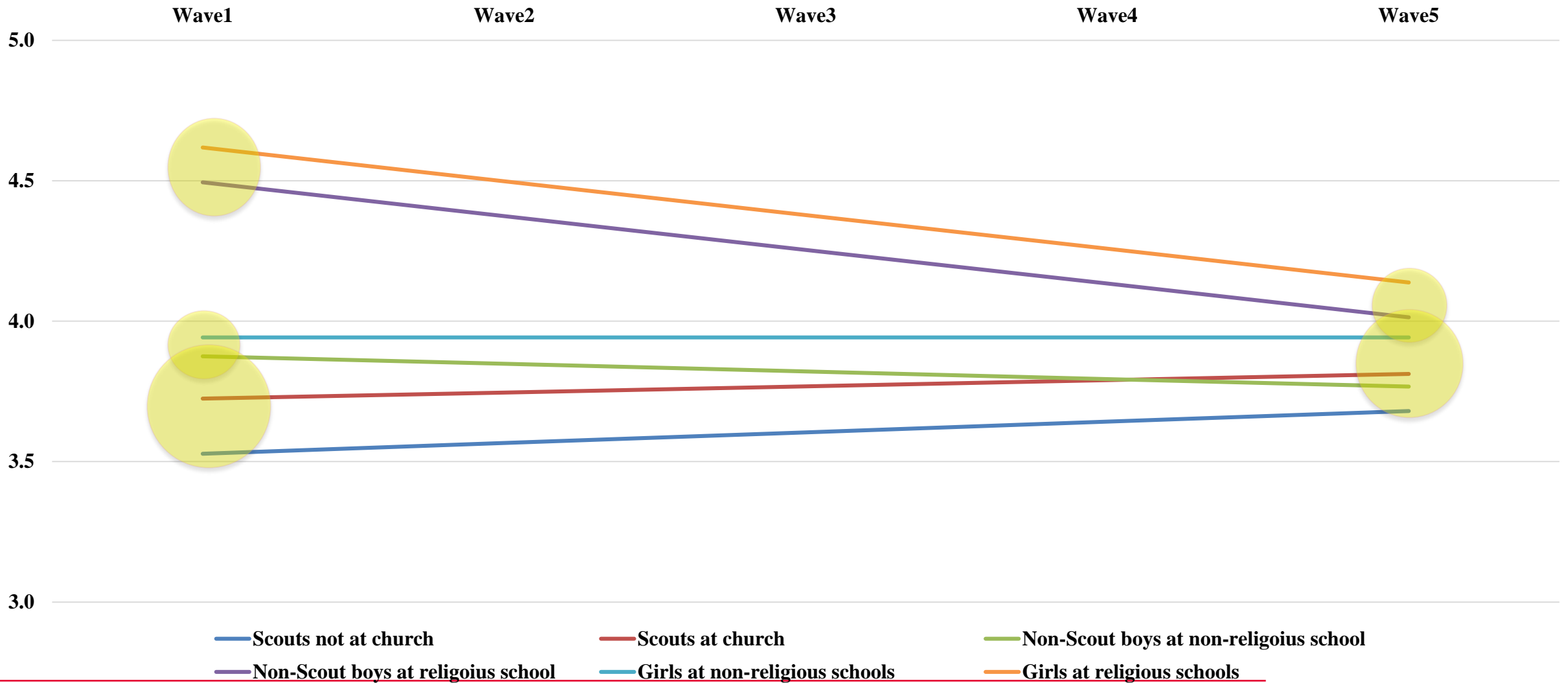


# Results



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I pray.

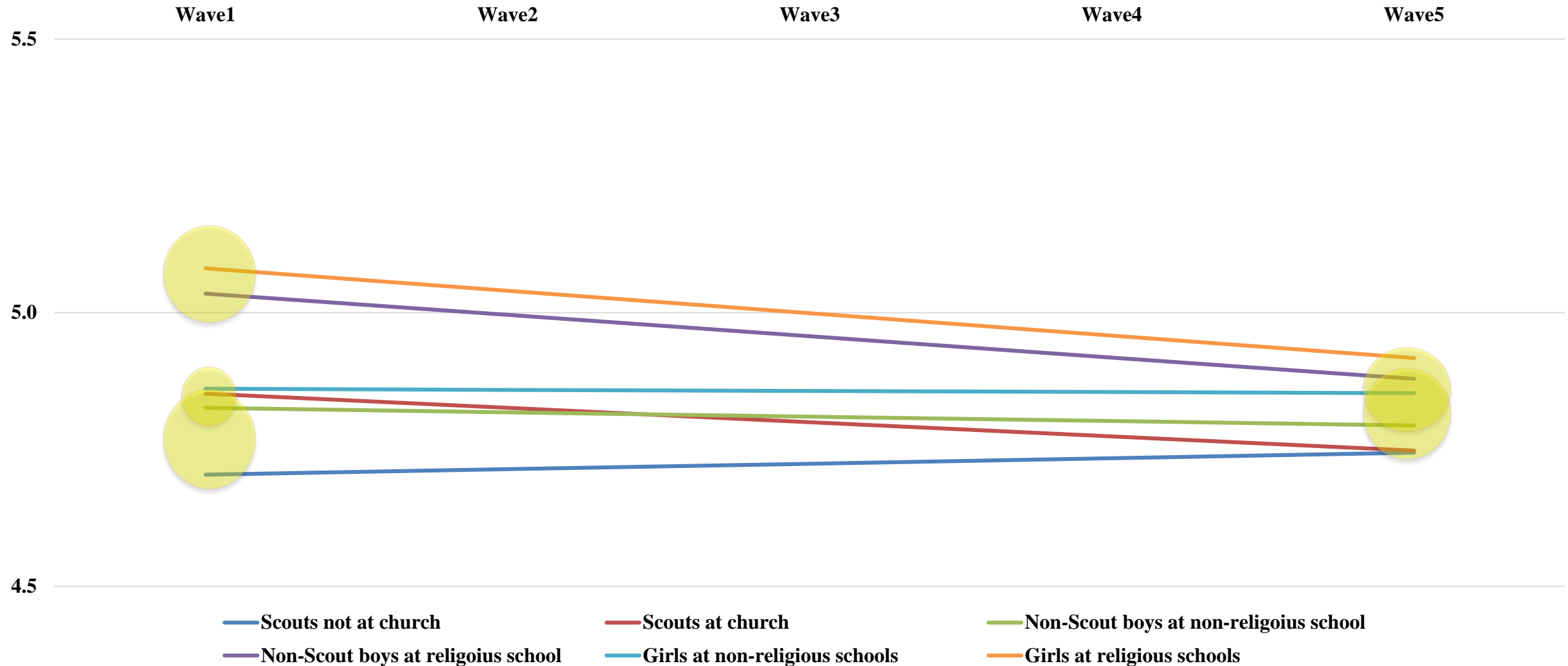


# Results



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I believe in God.



# Conclusions



- **Different religious dimensions have different within-person developmental trajectories.**
  - **Belief being more stable than emotion & practice.**
- **The development of religiosity differs across children by gender and developmental ecologies.**
  - **Girls being more religious.**
  - **Children attending religious schools:**
    - **Significantly more religious at Wave 1**
    - **Became similar to other children over time.**
- **During late childhood, most children reported being somewhat religious and showed stable religiosity.**

# Implications



- **Developmentally appropriate religious education: initiation and maintenance**
  - **Convergence during late childhood and early adolescence:**
    - **peer influence/belongingness**
  - **Differences and interrelations among belief, emotion, and practice**
    - **Time scales**
    - **Intentional approaches to address different aspects of religiosity**
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THANK YOU!

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