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Conceptual Development in Context: Indonesian Children's Beliefs About Natural and Supernatural Entities

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Abstract

How do children's conceptualizations of natural and supernatural entities develop in religious and cultural contexts? We explored this question in Indonesia—a Muslim-majority country in which religious affiliation is mandatory—as part of a larger multi-site collaborative project (The Developing Belief Network; Weisman et al., under review). Indonesian children (N=100, Ages 5-10) from Muslim or Christian families were asked about the properties and behaviors of different kinds of agents: (1) religious (e.g., God), (2) non-religious supernatural (e.g., ghosts), (3) fictional (e.g., fairies), and (4) natural/scientific (e.g., germs). We also measured each child's religious identification and involvement. We will compare how children of different religions conceptualize these agents, and how these beliefs vary with the child's age and religious identity. Our findings will shed new light on the interplay between religion, culture, and children's theories about the world.