

RELIGIOUS FAITH, FLOURISHING AND SELF-EFFICACY IN YOUNG ADULTS: A CORRELATIONAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT: *The present research explored the interrelationship of religious faith, flourishing and general self-efficacy (GSE) in young adults. Based on literature review, it was hypothesized that there would be a positive association of religious faith, flourishing and GSE. Sample consisted of 222 regular students (110 men and 112 women) who were all Muslims, with ages ranging from 18-26 years ($M=21$, $SD=1.96$) and educational level ranging from 13 to 18 years of education from University of Karachi, Pakistan. Participants were required to fill in the informed consent form along with their demographic information, and the questionnaires. Questionnaires included a) Abbreviated Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSRFQ-Brief; Plante, Vallaeys, Sherman, & Wallston, 2002), Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) and Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2009). Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the sample characteristics. Pearson's r was computed to find out the interrelationship of the variables. Results revealed statistically significant and positive correlations among religious faith, psychological flourishing and GSE. The implications and limitations of the study and recommendations for future research were also discussed.*

KEYWORDS: Religious Faith, General Self-Efficacy, Flourishing, Pakistani, Muslims, Young Adults

INTRODUCTION

Religious beliefs and practices like belief in the transcendent identity and life hereafter were prevalent in all ancient cultures since recorded history (Ward, 2010; Roshani, 2012), which reflects the importance of religion even before the existence of any modern civilization. Religion, we can say is as old as the human life on earth itself. A research conducted in 24 countries of the world concluded that seven out of ten people are affiliated with some religion and that most people regard religion as important in their lives (Ipsos MORI, 2011). Ardel and Koenig (2007) maintain that religion tends to reflect itself in a person's thought processes and actions, which consequently may have an effect on numerous social, physical and psychological variables. This might be the reason why researchers have regarded religion as an important and powerful 'social force' (e.g. Idler, 2008; Abdul-Khalek, 2010). Thus, it can be assumed that religion can have important physiological and psychological implications on its believers, a fact that prompted psychologists to study the relationship of religiosity with mental and physical health variables. Generally speaking, when we have strong faith in God, we tend to attribute our miseries as a test or a challenge from God that enables us to exercise patience, perseverance and the ability to come out from the tough situation stronger than before. This positive mindset might be helpful in fostering mastery over the otherwise uncontrollable

circumstances, thereby also promoting positive psychological functioning. According to Levin (2010), one's religious life is a significant indication of the quality of one's mental health. Before elaborating on the relationship of religiosity and mental health, it is imperative to understand the important variables pertaining to religion, as numerous definitions of religiosity have made the task of investigating its full impact on well-being more difficult (Ward, 2010). Koenig (2008) describes religion as involving beliefs, practices, and rituals that are concerned with the "sacred," and that sacred can be a supernatural force, transcendent or a God. According to Plante (personal communication, July 13, 2012), religiosity, religiousness and religious faith have no clear-cut demarcations as they mostly have semantic differences and so there is a good deal of overlapping among these terms. Likewise, Pargament (personal communication, July 14, 2012) also views religiousness as an umbrella term that covers religious beliefs, values, practices, commitment, relationships and emotions pertaining to the particular faith. According to Edwards, Lapp-Rincker, Magyar-Moe, Rehfeldt, Ryder, Brown and Lopez (2002), religious faith consists of the belief in a higher power or deity that provides meaning and a direction in life and it is usually manifested in the form of performing rituals like prayers and participating in religious services. Moreover, the strength of an individual's religious faith is the extent to which he or she is influenced by this relationship with a higher power (Edwards *et. al.*, 2002). Thus, keeping in view the overlapping of the terms religious faith, religiousness and religiosity, these terms will be used interchangeably in the upcoming sections.

The present research is based upon the previous literature that has demonstrated the positive connection of religiosity and other positive psychological variables like psychological flourishing and general self-efficacy (GSE). As a matter of fact, religiosity and subjective well-being studies have not adequately covered the Muslim cultures of the world (Dein, 2006; Sheridan & North, 2004; Feasel, 2012). Therefore, the research is aimed to assess the relationship of religious faith, psychological flourishing and GSE from the perspective of Pakistani Muslim youth, so as to fill any gaps in existing literature on religiosity and psychological well-being in specifically Muslim populations. For this purpose, the sample consisted of only Pakistani Muslim participants that were selected from a large public university of Pakistan, namely University of Karachi. Considering that the Pakistani society is predominantly Islamic in nature, comprising 96.4% Muslim population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2013), it is not surprising that Islam plays a very important role in the character-building of most Pakistanis (Azam, 2010). The "National Survey 2010" conducted by Gallup Pakistan (Gallup & Gilani, 2010) revealed that majority (35%) of Pakistanis consider religion as the source of satisfaction and contentment in their lives, followed by job (26%), peace (13%) and money (11%). The findings of this survey reflect the significance of religion and its perceived positive effects in a Pakistani society. Religious beliefs are also related with greater happiness according to the report of "The Global Barometer" poll (Gallup International, 2011), indicating that 42% Muslims reported general feelings of happiness. The findings of Feasel (2012) also indicate that there is overall greater subjective well-being in countries with higher population of Muslim and Christian particularly Catholic members. These findings indicate that although religion is linked to happiness, certain religious denominations including Islam and Christianity might be at a slightly greater advantage when it comes to religiosity-happiness link. Hence, it is plausible that the same relationship would be observed in a Pakistani society that is chiefly Islamic in character.

Religious Faith and Psychological Flourishing

According to Seligman (2010), flourishing is the prime objective of positive psychology, consisting of components like positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and

accomplishment (in short PERMA). There are evidences that people who are flourishing by the PERMA standard are also physically healthy, more productive in their jobs, and more peaceful than people who are not flourishing (Seligman, 2010). Keyes (2002) maintains that individuals having complete mental health are said to be flourishing in life with high well-being, while individuals with incomplete mental health are languishing in life, with low well-being. Flourishing not only prevents mental and physical health problems but also helps in creating meaningfulness in life (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005). When it comes to the correlates and determinants of psychological flourishing, researchers have identified religious faith as being one of them. According to Idler (2008), there is at least some evidence of mental health benefits of religion in both gender, including persons of quite different ages, various racial and ethnic groups and individuals from various socioeconomic classes and geographical locations (Idler, 2008). It has been observed that people tend to make sense of their problems by resorting to and deriving comfort from their religious beliefs, consequently experiencing a sense of relief and renewed positivity. The longitudinal study of Schnittker (2001) also found that when individuals experience multiple negative life events, their spirituality and religiousness result in significant stress reduction. Levin (2010) believes that one's religious faith tends to produce positive expectations; thereby instilling hope and optimism that can help prevent or reduce stress. Furthermore, Plante (2008) has emphasized the effectiveness of religious and spiritual coping strategies in the face of life's stressors; he also maintains that religious faith and spirituality are associated with greater psychological well-being like more optimism, compassion for self and others, forgiveness, and less anxiety and depression (Plante, 2008). Hence, the above findings strongly suggest the beneficial association of religious faith and psychological flourishing.

General Self-Efficacy, Religious Faith and Psychological Flourishing

The ability of humans to change their circumstances in the positive direction and master the challenges of life contributes greatly towards attaining mental well-being. According to Bandura (1993), the most pivotal and influential mechanism of agency is people's own beliefs about their capabilities to practice control over their own level of functioning and other events that influence their lives. Maddux (2000), therefore, regards self-efficacy as a truly positive psychology because self-efficacy specifically explores the human potential and possibilities, rather than limitations. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how much energy we invest on a task, how well we motivate ourselves and remain perseverant in challenging times, how we regulate our thoughts and actions, and our susceptibility to psychological problems (Pajares, 2005). Schwarzer, Luszczynska and Gutierrez-Doná (2005) defines general self-efficacy (GSE) as a belief that one can tackle a wide range of challenging and novel tasks, and manage stressful situations competently. Being able to cope with unpredictable situations and accomplishing the desired outcomes in the face of challenges engender positivity, confidence, resilience, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment within a person. Self-efficacy beliefs, therefore, play a pivotal role in "psychological adjustment, psychological problems, physical health, as well as professionally guided and self-guided behavioral change strategies" (Maddux, 2000, Para. 2). It is believed that positive emotions and optimism are more likely to enhance confidence and mastery skills in a person, whereas, negative mood like depression and hopelessness will likely reduce the self-efficacy beliefs (Pajares, 2005; Maddux 2000).

Just as our internal affective states affect the self-perceived mastery, however, sometimes it is the other way around. A person with high self-efficacy will view any emotional state as emotionally enriching, while a person with low self-efficacy will interpret the same situation or mood as emotionally draining (Pajares, 2005). Highly self-efficacious people are the masters

of their lives. They know they can alter their circumstances, change the outcomes if they strive hard and come up with effective solutions to their problems rather than acting like prisoners of destiny. This can-do belief fosters positive psychological functioning as lack of control over one's life produce negative feelings that result in low well-being. Kvarme, Haraldstad, Helseth, Sørum and Natvig (2009) assessed 279 school children and found a significant positive relationship between GSE and their physiological, psychological and functional aspect of well-being. A large study assessing 4,493 male drug-abusers demonstrated that low general self-efficacy turned out to be a good predictor of low mental health and high self-efficacy to be a good predictor of high mental health (Bavojdan, Towhidi & Rahmati, 2011). Overall, It can be implied that greater mastery skills are related to greater happiness, satisfaction and a sense of accomplishment. This creates a virtuous cycle, in that higher psychological flourishing provides mental clarity and an optimistic outlook that enables a person to exercise effective control over challenging events.

Religious beliefs, in particular, provide a meaning-system that can influence our goals, actions and outcome expectations, including self-efficacy (Martin, 2008). According to Koenig, Carson and King (2012), when religious persons are faced with challenges, they believe that by turning to and praying to God, they can alter their situation or get enough strength to tolerate it. The authors maintain that such beliefs reduce feelings of helplessness, lack of strength and a need to rely on outside forces for support (Koenig, Carson & King, 2012). Another study by de Leon (2000) revealed strong positive correlations among strength of religious faith, self-efficacy and total family functioning. Furthermore, Davidsdottir and Jonsdottir (2013) found that religious people experienced greater well-being, optimism, self-efficacy and less psychological and domestic problems. Numerous studies in specifically Muslim cultures have also demonstrated a positive association of religious faith and psychological variables, like happiness, optimism, SWB, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (e.g. Sahraian, Gholami, Javadpour & Omidvar, 2013; Behdani, Dastjerdi & Sharifzadeh, 2012; Tavabi & Iran-Pour, 2011; Abdul-Khalek, 2010; Tiliouine & Belgoumidi, 2009; Abdul-Khalek & Lester, 2007; Suhail & Chaudhry, 2004).

Research Hypothesis

The empirical findings mentioned so far have led to the hypothesis that there will be a significant positive association of religious faith, general self-efficacy and psychological flourishing.

METHOD

Participants

The sample consisted of 222 university students (110 men and 112 women), ages ranging from 18-26 years ($M= 21$, $SD= 2$), studying as full-time regular students in the morning shift in University of Karachi. Their years of education ranged from 13 years (BS 1st year) to 18 years (MS/M.Phil.). The participants were selected on convenient sampling basis and it was ensured that they were all Muslims.

Measures

Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire-Brief Version (SCSRFQ-Brief Version; Plante, Vallaey, Sherman, & Wallston, 2002). The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSRFQ) is a brief (10-item, or five item short form version), reliable, and valid self report measure assessing strength of religious faith and engagement suitable for use with multiple religious traditions as well as for people without any interest in or affiliation with religious organizations or traditions and perspectives (Plante, 2010). For the SCSRQ-brief version, using questions 2, 4, 5, 8 and 10 of the original scale provides a $>.95$ correlation with results from the longer version (Plante, Vallaey, Sherman & Wallston, 2002). To calculate the strength of religious faith, the scores on all the five items will be summed up. They will range from 5 (low faith) to 20 (high faith) on SCSRQ-Brief Version.

Generalized Self-efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The GSE Scale measures beliefs in one's capability to handle new and difficult tasks in a variety of different domains. It consists of 10 items. Internal consistencies, item-total correlations, factor loadings and fit indices of the confirmatory factor analysis indicate that the GSE Scale is reliable, homogeneous and unidimensional across 25 nations. GSE is a unidimensional scale, and its internal consistency ranged from .75 to .91 (Scholz, Gutierrez-Don'a, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). For scoring, sum up the responses to all 10 items to yield the final composite score ranging from 10 to 40.

Flourishing Scale (FS; Diener, Wirtz, Tov, Kim-Prieto, Choi, Oishi, & Biswas-Diener, 2009). The FS is a brief 8-item scale that measures how you are functioning in key areas of your life such as, social relationships, self-respect, engaging occupations, spirituality and whether you are living with purpose and meaning. The scale provides a single psychological well-being- PWB score. The measure has good psychometric properties, and is strongly associated with other psychological well-being scales. Telef (2001) conducted the reliability study of the FS, which yielded a Cronbach Alfa coefficient of .80 and test retest reliability was found to be ($r= 0.86$, $p<.001$). Scoring is done by adding the responses, varying from 1 to 7, for all eight items. The possible range of scores is from 8 to 56.

Demographic Information Sheet. The demographic information sheet consisted of information regarding respondents' 1) Age, 2) Gender, 3) Department, 4) Year of Education 5) Religion

Procedure

Participants from four major faculties of University of Karachi i.e. Arts, Science, Pharmacy, and Management and Administrative Sciences took part in this survey. Participants were individually approached from each faculty on convenient sample basis. They were asked about their religious faiths before giving them the questionnaires to ensure the inclusion of only Muslim participants in the study. The researcher briefly explained the participants about the purpose of the study. An "informed consent form" was then given to the participants that contained information about the purpose of the study as well as ethical issues regarding the voluntary participation and confidentiality of the participants. After signing the consent form, the participants had to fill out the demographic information sheet, along with the research scales. The researcher was present with the participants during the survey in order to answer their queries. Completion of the questionnaires took no more than 15 minutes. Participants were then thanked for their participation in the study.

RESULTS

The descriptive analysis revealed that the mean age of the participants was 21 years ($SD= 1.96$) and average years of education indicated an undergraduate level ($M= 14$ years; $SD= 1.05$).

Table 1

Measures	Gender	Means	<i>SD</i>
Flourishing Scale	Male	46.71	6.29
	Female	45.27	5.89
GSE Scale	Male	26.67	5.50
	Female	28.99	5.66
SCSRF Scale	Male	15.90	3.48
	Female	16.69	2.37

Sample Mean Scores and Standard Deviations on Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire, Flourishing Scale and General Self-Efficacy Scale

The results revealed that overall the participants scored moderately on all the three scales, indicating moderate flourishing, religious faith and general self-efficacy. An interesting finding was that the male and females performed more or less equally on each scale, which suggests similarities between both genders.

Table 2

Variables	1	2	3
Self-Efficacy	--		
Religious Faith	.25**	--	
Flourishing	.33**	.29**	--

** $p < .01$

Pearson Correlation Matrix among the Study Variables

The Pearson's correlation matrix shows that all the study variables above have statistically significant but not very strong correlations with each other.

Discussion

Every religion teaches something positive and emphasizes on moral values that lead us to the path of righteousness. Religion instills goodness, positivity, morality, integrity, gratefulness and other positive attributes in its believers. The present study was aimed to explore the association of religious faith, psychological flourishing and general self-efficacy in young adults. Since the participants in the present study were Muslims, it is pertinent to understand how Islamic teachings are associated with the well-being of Muslim believers. Muslims hold a firm belief that Islam is a complete code of life that provides guidance in the spiritual, familial, social, political, psychological and economic aspects of life. The holy book of Muslims i.e. The Holy Quran clearly advises us to be patient in our difficulties (The Holy Quran, 16:127). Islamic teachings, therefore, promote positive psychological well-being and other positive

attributes like self-growth, self-acceptance and sense of personal meaning in Muslim believers (Aflakseir, 2012). The findings of the present study corroborated empirical findings (e.g. Levin, 2010; Martin, 2008; Pajares, 2005; Madux, 2000) suggesting a significant positive relationship of religious faith, flourishing and GSE in Pakistani Muslim youth. Although the correlations were statistically significant and positive, they were not very strong. It was also observed that the male and female participants performed more or less equally on the three scales employed in this study, suggesting similarities between both genders. It is important to note that Islamic faith emphasizes the reward for every good deed in the hereafter (The Holy Quran, 16:111). This very belief in the mercy, justice and kindness of Allah Almighty enable the Muslim believers to lead their lives with hope, optimism, goodness, meaning and purpose. Hence, we can imply that the Islamic faith of our study participants might have contributed to greater flourishing (moderate high psychological well-being score as indicated by the results) and its positive relationship with religious faith.

It should be noted that since the flourishing scale measures self-perceived success in different aspects of an individual's life, the scores could have been skewed by the respondent's current state of mind, their current feelings and beliefs. When interpreting the results of any measure of SWB, it should be kept in mind that the estimates of any component of global SWB (including flourishing) are affected by people's current mood, their beliefs about happiness and the convenience of retrieving positive and negative emotions (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2002). Personality differences might also affect the psychological well-being ratings as some people are simply happier, while some seem to be sadder than others (Behlau, 2010). This might imply that a person might be very religious yet does not experience higher flourishing, because of sad personality disposition. Likewise, a person who is inherently happier might not feel the need to be deeply religious. Furthermore, university students have to face many challenges and stressors associated with university life (Behlau, 2010) that might include career-related issues like earning more money, balancing work, studies and domestic lives at the same time, having multiple responsibilities of family, having high aspirations and goals for future life etc. These problems can possibly have a negative effect on students' well-being. Some of the aforementioned factors might explain why the correlation of religious faith and flourishing was not very strong in our sample. The study findings also imply that GSE is positively associated with both religious faith and flourishing. As according to Maddux (2000), exerting effective control over our behavior, circumstances, thoughts and emotions is necessary for happiness and well-being. Furthermore, having a strong religious faith ensures that the Almighty's support is always present for us, which makes it easier to not only accept challenging circumstances as positive, but also gives us courage to exercise effective control over our life. Aflakseir (2012) also maintains that Islamic beliefs give individuals a meaningful interpretation of difficult events.

It is possible that some people experience low flourishing at the current point of life because of academic or environmental stressors yet have high self-efficacy and the motivation to deal with the challenges of life. Likewise, sometimes the positive objective circumstances of life lead the person to experience high psychological well-being, yet he/she may not have the necessary coping skills when negative circumstances arise at any point in life. Also, sometimes people might be deeply religious and completely rely on the Almighty to solve their problems, yet do not exercise personal efforts and motivation to cope with the stressors of life. Frequent failures might also adversely affect the efficacy beliefs in a person. The aforementioned factors might explain the weak correlation of GSE with flourishing and religious faith, despite being statistically significant and positive.

Implications of the Study

The results of the study have brought us to a clearer understanding of how the association of religious faith, flourishing and GSE can contribute to a well-adjusted and psychologically healthy Pakistani Muslim society. As for the people who are not religious, the positive association of GSE and flourishing can still be of great importance. The research has positively contributed to the psychological literature and opened further avenues for future studies that might elaborate on these findings on Pakistani Muslims, or replicate and compare those findings in other Muslim cultures. Introducing appropriate interventions that can enhance the self-efficacy of students particularly, will not only build their ability to deal with stressors, but it will also enhance their overall well-being and quality of life. Mental-health practitioners can also utilize the study findings for people suffering from psychological problems. They can easily incorporate religious and spiritual treatments to supplement the traditional psychotherapy practices for clients who are already religious, in order to increase their chances of experiencing greater psychological well-being.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the findings of the present study were generally encouraging, and were consistent with empirical literature suggesting a positive relationship of religious faith, flourishing and GSE in Pakistani Muslim youth. This relationship indeed bears important implications for the individual's well-being. However, the nature of the correlation among the variables did not turn out to be very strong in the present study, which warrants the need for further research into the same area.

Limitations and Recommendations

The findings might be limited because of the self-report measures employed in the present study. Self-reports concerning religious faith or religiosity can be biased especially if the participants want to show themselves as more religious than they really are for fear of creating a negative impression. Moreover, there is a possibility that the day the questionnaires were filled out, life events might have been more overwhelming than that of other days which might have skewed the participants' opinion of their well-being or self-efficacy. Since, the sample was drawn from one university, it would have been more representative if further research in a larger, more diverse population were done. Also, the participants in the study were educated adults only; future studies might also include less privileged participants and then compare them with educated adults so as to assess whether higher education also affects psychological well-being and religious faith. The present study could also be replicated by including participants from older age groups as well for comparison of their scores with younger participants. It is suggested that future research should include members of the religious minorities of Pakistan also. This would provide a more thorough understanding of the relationship of religious faith (regardless of any particular denomination) and positive psychological variables in Muslims and other religious communities of Pakistan.

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