

Relationship between stress and emotional distress among university students

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Abstract: Majority of people experience stress as they seek to establish equilibrium between professional and social life; they attempt to satisfy the demands of study and/or work while simultaneously trying to have time for family and friends. Stress has been so much incorporated in daily life that it has become a way of life for most people. However, a person who possesses strong faith and is religiously strong seems to live a psychologically healthy life. The present research has been designed to identify the detrimental effects of stress on the psychological health of religiously strong students in comparison with other students. The data was collected from different departments of University of Karachi. Oxford happiness Questionnaire and Comparison between stress and emotional distress in religious and non religious students were used for the research. The results were calculated through related t-test. The result showed that there are significant differences in the level of stress and emotional distress between hafiz-e-Quran and those who are not hafiz as $p < 0.01$. Hence proving that, religion plays an important role to live a psychologically healthy life.

Keywords: Stress, emotional distress, university students.

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INTRODUCTION

Religious convictions have been present in almost all cultures of the world since the dawn of human civilization. Approximately, 86 percent of the world's population maintains affiliation with some sort of spiritual or religious guidance system^{1,2}. Despite a remarkable prevalence of religion and its significant impact in the lives of adherents, studies exploring interconnection between religion-following and psychological well-being comprise an insignificantly small portion of the psychology literature¹. This study-gap might be attributed to the fact that studies encircling religion are complex to conduct. Religions vary in scope and intensity, and these differences have remarkable effects on morals, values, behavior, cognition, emotion, and culture, thus making a systematic approach to research challenging. Moreover, defining religion is one of the most notable problems in this area; it is problematic to set a clear criterion regarding what constitutes religion and what lies beyond the scope of religion.

Numerous studies have correlated religious life with physical health. It is proposed that because several religions emphasize the importance of human body as the sacred vessel holding spirit, the individual is discouraged from harming his or her body with unhealthy practices⁸. Furthermore, religious and/or spiritual individuals tend to possess higher-than-average levels of gratitude, compassion, hope, and optimism; this may be a significant factor in their above-average physical and psychological health¹⁴. Therefore, orientation towards religion is associated with positive well-being outcomes, whereas an extrinsic orientation is likely to be associated with

poor indicators of well-being. For example, intrinsic orientation is frequently related to fewer depressive symptoms and reduced trait anxiety, while extrinsic orientation is related to strong depressive symptoms and trait anxiety^{3,10}.

Stress has become an everyday-phenomenon. It manifests itself in the challenges of daily-life. People experience episodic stress when preparing for a major exam, writing an important paper, or getting prepared for a job-interview. Stress has both direct and indirect effects on almost the entire organic system of the body. Even in the absence of a deliberate and conscious strategy to mitigate stress, individuals cannot always remain in a constant state of tension or emotional strain. The concepts of stress and coping are neutral. Although stress is commonly viewed as negative and coping as positive, the relationship between these two phenomena is not that simple. Psychologically, stress can be both positive and negative, and the means of dealing with stress can be both effective and ineffective in coping with the challenge presented by the stressful situation. Religion plays a very important role while coping with stress and emotional distress. A person with strong faith and is spiritually strong can deal with stressful situations in a better way, as compared to a person who is spiritually low.

In light of the above literature review, the objective of this study is to locate the relationship between stress and emotional distress among religious and non-religious university students. The hypothesis of the study is that the level of stress and emotional distress would be low among *hafiz-e-Quran* as compared to other students.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

CONCLUSION

Sampling

The sample consisted of 100 university students 50 hafiz e Quran and 50 those who are not hafiz from various departments of University of Karachi. The method of convenient sampling was used in the study.

Design

Cross sectional design was used in the experiment.

Material

The Oxford Happiness Questionnaire was used to measure the state of happiness in individuals. It consists of 29 items.

Comparison between stress and emotional distress in religious and non religious students.

Procedure

The present study was conducted in University of Karachi. Firstly, the subjects were provided with the Consent Form. They read and signed the form and then filled the Demographic sheet which included their personal information. After that they were given the Questionnaires, they read carefully and noted their answers on the sheet. Any queries about the questionnaires were responded accordingly.

Ethical considerations

Firstly, the participants were asked for permission to perform the task. After getting consent from participants, they were briefed about the purpose of the study. From the very start, the participants were made aware of their right to withdraw from the survey during any phase of the study. Even at the end of the study, all participants had a final opportunity to withdraw and withheld the data they provided for this research.

Statistics

The results were calculated through related t-test.

RESULT

t-test table for stress between hafiz e Quran and those who are not hafiz.

N	df	T	Sig. level	Table value
Hafiz e Quran=50 Non-hafiz=50	98	-0.94	p<0.01	$\alpha=2.617$

t-test table for emotional distress between hafiz-e-Quran and those who are not hafiz.

N	df	T	Sig. level	Table value
Hafiz e Quran=50 Non-hafiz=50	98	0.96	p<0.01	$\alpha=2.617$

There are significant differences in the level of stress and emotional distress between hafiz e Quran and those who are not hafiz as $p<0.01$. Hence null hypotheses are rejected.

DISCUSSION

This research study investigated the level of stress among religious and non religious students. The findings of the study reveal that there are substantial disparities in the level of stress and emotional distress between hafiz e Quran and those who are not hafiz as $P<0.01$. Religion plays a vital role in a person's life. It helps in coping with stressful situations. Some studies indicate that stress-coping strategies include behavior and thoughts deployed by the individual to manage a particular stressful situation. Furthermore, the relationship between religion-following and mental health is a topic about which much has been written in terms of pros and cons of 3 following a religion¹⁵. In the early twentieth century, Sigmund Freud documented his opinions on the detrimental impact of religion on psychological development. He opined that religion was an illusion without a future. More recently, Attorney Richard Yao founded a group named "Fundamentalists Anonymous," which is established to assist people in overcoming the so-called emotional distress of a conservative religious upbringing⁹. The Islamic viewpoint sees religion as the triple mandate of faith (*iman*), action (*amal*), and worship (*ibadah*). Another research study inquired about the relationship between stress and religious orientation in university students. To establish the degree of relationship between dependent and independent variables, this exploratory study employed descriptive and quantitative terms. Moreover, the strength and magnitude of the relationships was also studied by highlighting the fact that a correctional study is an effective strategy in situations where experimental research is difficult¹⁷. The findings of the study revealed that the majority of participants experienced slight and moderate levels of stress. This is persuasive evidence that academic stress is not severe; it is merely mild. However, it is both usual and essential to have moderate level of stress in order to compel students for the completion of their academic duties. In the total absence of stress, students are unlikely to finish their tasks¹⁶. Generally, the sampled students revealed slight and moderate levels of somatic problems and psychological depression. This was attributed to the corresponding of stress noticeable among them. Stress and strain are correlated. Numerous students employed substantial

levels of religious orientation because of the slight and moderate levels of stress, as well as strain, that they reported. These results were correlated; however, correlation was not found to be strong and persuasive. Nevertheless, the findings were in conformity with the majority of literature on religious orientation, where several studies have obtained evidence that religious orientation can be safely associated with mental health^{4,6,11,13,16}. The religion offers opportunities to enhance control, and this is effective in managing the circumstances that compel an individual to work beyond his or her capabilities¹³. A psychological connection with a supreme force that one usually perceives as God having ultimate control and influence over the circumstances when one is faced with uncertainty and challenges offers a sense of security and comfort.

It is vital to consider that measures of psychological constructs may not be as relevant to a student sample as they are to a general population¹². In a research sample, males reported slightly high levels of strain, stress and religious orientation as compared to females; however, these findings are inconsistent with those of several other studies that were conducted elsewhere⁷. Therefore, it may be the irreligious nature of the sample which accounts for the absence of association between religiosity, stress, and psychological distress. The relevance of religion in students' capability to cope with stress is likely to depend significantly on individual perceptions and the strength, or otherwise, of a particular student's faith. Hence, if religion is a mere matter of orientation, i.e. solely a thought process with marginal action, then the capacity of religious influence on stress is low. On the contrary, a faithful follower is freed of his/her stress by engaging in the religious rituals and practices. Thus, the present study has established and explored the relationship between stress and religion. Previous research studies on this subject indicate persuasive evidence of relationship between psychological well-being and religious association.

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