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Effect of gender and levels of religiosity on prosocial behaviour of youth

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Abstract--Religious traditions tend to promote prosocial behaviours among their followers. All major religions emphasise moral behaviour and explicitly teach prosociality as a virtue. Previous studies have shown support for the relationship between religion and volunteerism, helping others and youth's positive social behaviour. The present study aimed to explore the effect of gender, levels of religiosity and their interaction on the prosocial behaviour of a sample of youth. The sample comprised 90 (45 male, 45 female) youths chosen from a city. Adults' Prosocialness Scale (Capara *et al.*, 2005), Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington *et al.*, 2003), and Islamic Religiosity Attitude (Marva, 2010) were administered for data collection. Descriptive statistics and two-way ANOVA were used for statistical analysis. Results revealed a statistically significant main effect for different levels of religiosity on prosocial behaviour. In contrast, the main effect of gender and interaction of gender and levels of religiosity on prosocial behaviour was not found significant. Findings underline the importance of religiosity in enhancing prosocial behaviour and positive psychosocial development of individuals, especially youth.

Keywords--religiosity, prosocial behaviour, youth, positive development.

Introduction

In the present materialistic world, people are generally more selfish and are concerned only with their welfare or advantage. In other words, self-centeredness is more common in society and lacks empathy and prosocial behaviour. Thus, it is a pressing need for an hour to wake up, be vigilant about surroundings, and explore ways to be positive and act positively. So, prosociality or prosocial

behaviour is quite an important aspect for inculcating change in individuals, groups, society and the nation at large irrespective of gender and age for making our society healthy and befitting for everyone.

Prosociality is an important issue in current behavioural research. Understanding prosocial behaviour is critical to the study of development trajectory, individual differences, psychological well-being, interpersonal relationships and how people interact (Batson & Powell, 2003; Pavey et al., 2012; Van Tongeren et al., 2016). These voluntary and intentional actions such as donating, sharing, comforting, expressing sympathy, helping and providing physical benefit are carried out by the individual to fulfil people's need for support and often incur costs to himself (Zahn-Waxler & Smith, 1992; Penner et al., 2005; Bar-Tal, 1982; Eiesenberg & Fabes, 1998).). Various studies revealed that through helping and volunteering, young people could satisfy their own needs, learn and express their values, understand the world to gain career-related experience, and strengthen social competence and relationships (Penner et al., 2005; Schwartz et al., 2009). "On the community or societal level, prosocial behaviours such as cooperation, responsibility and teamwork are crucial to the effective functioning of work and social interactions. Prosocial and altruistic behaviour like volunteering or caregiving could be a major source of a society's human capital" (Siu *et al.*, 2012). The cultivation of prosocial behaviour has long been an important objective of compulsory education and youth development programmes. Prosocial development is closely linked to various positive developmental outcomes for young people, including academic success, positive self-worth, positive relationships with others and higher social competence (Penner et al., 2005; Schwartz et al., 1999). Religion being social, engaging in religion profoundly influences different areas of individuals' social life (Oviedo, 2015), and one such area is prosocial behaviour (Saroglou, 2013). It has been found that religious traditions tend to promote prosocial behaviours among their followers. All major world religions emphasise moral behaviour and explicitly teach prosociality as a virtue. To be precise, there is much support for the relationship between religiosity, prosociality and positive youth psychosocial outcomes.

Religiosity and Prosocial Behavior

Religiosity, as a personal construct, is associated with an individual's attitudes, moral beliefs, and practices. According to Stolz et al. (2013), generally, religiosity is found to be positively

associated with youth prosocial behaviour (e.g. social initiative) and negatively predicted antisocial behaviour (e.g. substance use, delinquency). Prior research has revealed that religious people were more willing to take part in charity activities (Lam, 2002); high levels of religiosity were statistically linked with increased prosocial behaviour (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Saroglou et al., 2005; Perry *et al.*, 2008); and religion showing as a motivating factor in helping behaviour among the people (Einhoff, 2011). While some other studies have examined religiosity as a predictor of prosocial behaviour and whether it could be directed toward family or in-group members (e.g., Blogowska, Lambert & Saroglou, 2013; Krause & Hayward, 2014). Results of such studies have been mixed, though some findings support religiosity playing a role in charity, volunteerism, and other

helping behaviour under only certain conditions (Hunsberger & Platonow, 2001; Krause & Hayward, 2014; Sappington & Bake, 1995). These studies often do not consider other potential factors that may have influenced participant behaviour, such as personality, gender or environmental influences. Few studies were conducted to examine the Muslim population's impact of religiosity on prosocial behaviour. A study done in Morocco by Duhaime (2015) reported that religious salience increases prosocial behaviour. In this study, the audibility of the Muslim call to prayer (adhan) was linked with increased charity donations among the participants. A comparative research on helping behaviours conducted by Kanekar and Merchant (2001) in India among Muslim and Hindu participants revealed that the likelihood of helping was higher among the Muslim than Hindu participants when the need for help was seen as unjustified and when the relationship between helper and the person needing help disliked each other. In the justified and likeable condition, there were no significant differences in willingness to help. The authors attribute these differences between Hindu and Muslim participants to the Muslims' emphasis on brotherhood. A study by French et al. (2013) of Indonesian Muslims assessed how parents' religiosity was related to adolescents' prosocial behaviour and found that both parental religiosity and adolescent religiosity strongly correlated to prosocial behaviours. The present study aims to explore the levels of religiosity in a sample of youth and to examine the impact of different levels of religiosity on their prosocial behaviour.

Prosocial Behavior and Youth

Prosocial Behavior / prosocialness is an elusive and complex subject. The "heuristic value of prosocialness" partly makes it elusive and difficult to devise strategies with the most widespread applicability, especially concerning the assessment of adults' prosocial responses. There exists limited literature regarding the psychological meaning of prosocialness for personal well-being and adjustment during later stages of life. As a result, "the study of prosocialness in adulthood is still in infancy" (Caprara et al., 2005, p.77). It has been well documented in related research that prosocial responding becomes relatively stable during late childhood and early adolescence, and it originates from complex developmental and psychological processes involving attentional and evaluative processes, moral reasoning, social competence and self-regulatory capacities (Caprara & Pastorelli, 1993; Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Krebs & Van Hesteren, 1994). It is in adulthood. However, that prosocial behaviour may acquire particular importance and social meaning. During adulthood, one's tendency to act prosocially may be threatened and encountered by interpersonal experiences (e.g. those encountered in the work environment) that may draw upon alternative values or goals such as, for instance, competition, personal achievement and individual power (Caprara et al., 2005). In adulthood, the relationship between gender and prosocial responding might also find its fullest meaning (Belansky & Boggiano, 1994; Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Eagly & Crowley, 1986)). Men and women generally do not differ in respect of religious orientation and prosocial actions. At times, we find that men and women display different prosocial behaviour because of the type of behaviour, social framing, gender roles and social situations or contexts (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). The psychological component of prosocialness renders its existing measurement a debatable issue. Therefore, the most common measures of prosocial behaviours are designed to

assess global prosocial behaviour. The global prosocial behaviour measures assess personal tendencies to exhibit several prosocial behaviours across context and motives (Green et al., 1994). Global prosocial behaviour or social competence measures are limited as prior research has shown that there are different types of prosocial behaviours: altruistic, compliant, emotional, public, anonymous and dire, and each type has different personal and situational correlates. Some researchers have shown that there are individual differences in children who exhibit prosocial behaviours in high vs low emotionally evocative situations (Carlo et al., 1999a).

Furthermore, some helping behaviours are motivated by internalised norms/principles and sympathy responses. In contrast, other helping behaviours are motivated by extrinsic motivators (e.g. gaining the approval of others) (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998). Another type of measure is an assessment of prosocial behaviours in a specific context. These assessments are often behavioural observations of helping opportunities (e.g. picking up dropped items, donating money) designed for specific, experimental studies. Besides, many researchers examine prosocial intentions to study prosocial behaviour. "Prosocial intentions reflect a person's readiness to help others" (Agerstrom & Bjorklund, 2009), yet "we were unable to find any commonly used, validated measures of prosocial intentions" (Baumsteiger & Siegel, 2019, p.305). Given the limitations described above, a structured multidimensional measure of prosocial behaviour in late adolescents was used in this study.

Objective

The present study aimed to examine the effect of gender, levels of religiosity and their interaction on the prosocial behaviour of youth.

Hypotheses

H₀₁: There will be no significant difference in the prosocial behaviour score for males and females.

H₀₂: There will be no significant difference in the prosocial behaviour score for different levels of religiosity.

H₀₃: There will be no significant interaction between gender and levels of religiosity in affecting prosocial behaviour.

Method

Sample

The sample of the study comprised 90 (45 male, 45 female) college-aged Muslim youth between 22 and 35 years with a mean age of 25.57 years (SD = 5.605). They were purposively chosen from the different departments of studies of Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh (India). With regard to the educational qualifications of all 90 participants, 15 (16.7%) were enrolled in B. A., 38 (42.2%) in M. A. 1st year, 28 (31.1%) in M. A. 2nd year, and 9 (10.0%) in Ph. D.

Measures

Religiosity and prosocial behaviour were measured using the following scales;

The Religious Commitment Inventory (RCI-10; Worthington *et al.*, 2003):

RCI-10 was used to measure the level of participants' religiosity / religious commitment. RCI-10 consists of 10 items, with two subscales measuring intrapersonal religious commitment (6 items) and interpersonal religious commitment (4 items). Items are rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (not at all true of me) to 5 (totally true of me). The total score was used for this study. The coefficient alpha for the full scale was .93. In the current study, the coefficient alpha for the full scale was .71.

The Scale of Islamic Religiosity Attitude (SIRA; Marwa, 2010):

The worship subscale of SIRA was used to measure the extent to which people are engaged in religious rituals. It contains nine items with a five-point Likert response format, ranging from 1(never) to 5 (always). Items measure the frequency of performing the ritual prayer (*salat*), the pilgrimage to Mecca, fasting during the holy month of *Ramadan*, paying *Zakah*, etc. In the current study, the coefficient alpha for the subscale was .65. The scores of both scales were summed to measure religiosity. The coefficient alpha for the combined scale was .77.

Adults' Prosocialness Scale (Capara *et al.*, 2005): The self-report 16 items measure was used to assess adults' prosocialness. It measures behaviour and feelings that can be traced back to one of the four actions: sharing, helping, taking care of, and feeling empathetic with others and their needs or requests. Participants responded to statements on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *never/ almost never true* (1) to *almost always/always true* (5). Scores vary from 16 to 80, with a higher score indicating a high level of prosocial behaviour. The coefficient alpha for the present sample was .78.

Design

3x2 factorial design with three levels of religiosity (low, moderate and high) and two genders (male and female) was used.

Procedure

All questionnaires were administered individually to the identified participants upon receiving consent. The participants volunteered for the study after the researcher explained its purpose and assured them anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained. Students who did not want to participate were allowed to withdraw. Once the students completed the questionnaires, the researcher thanked them for their time and participation. Descriptive statistics and two-way ANOVA were used for the statistical analysis. It was carried out with the SPSS version (17.0).

Results

A two-way between-groups analysis was conducted to explore the impact of gender and levels of religiosity on the prosocial behaviour of youth. Participants were divided into three religious groups on the basis of equal percentiles (33.33). It is evident from Table 1 that there was a statistically significant main effect for different levels of religiosity [$F(2, 84) = 4.523, p < .01$]. However, the effect size was small (partial eta square=.097). A significant F ratio for levels of religiosity revealed that participants with varying levels of religiosity were significantly different with respect to their prosocial behaviour. But the main effect for gender [$F(1, 84) = 3.140, p > .05$] was not significant. Thus, it is evident that male and female participants didn't differ in terms of their prosocial scores. Still, there is a difference in prosocial behaviour scores for low, moderate and high religious subjects. Moreover, the interaction effect [$F(2, 84) = .085, p > .05$] was also not significant, implying that different levels of religiosity do not have a differential effect on prosocial behaviour for males and females.

Table 1:

Analysis of Variance showing Impact of Gender and Religiosity on Prosocial Behaviour

[N=90; Male (n=45); Female (n=45); Levels of religiosity n=30 in each]

Sources of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F
1. Main Effect				
Gender	132.315	1	132.315	3.140
Levels of Religiosity (3Groups)	381.926	2	190.963	4.523**
2. Interaction Effect				
Gender x Levels of Religiosity	7.158	2	3.579	.085
Error	3539.483	84	42.137	
Total	329550.000	90		

** $p < .01$

Table 2

Results of Tukey's HSD test for the Difference between the Means of any two Groups

Variable	Levels of Religiosity & Prosocial Behavior Mean (SD)	Groups Compared n = 30	Mean Difference
Prosocial Behavior	Low (≤ 68) 57.100(7.522)	Low & Moderate	-4.033*
	Moderate (69-75) 61.133(6.507)	Moderate & High	1.033

High 62.167(5.286)	High & Low	-5.066*
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* $p < .05$

Post-hoc comparison using Tukey's HSD test, as shown in Table 2, indicates that the mean score of prosociality for the low level of religiosity ($M=57.100$, $SD=7.522$) was significantly and statistically different from the mean scores for moderate ($M= 61.133$, $SD = 6.507$) and high ($M=62.167$, $SD= 5.286$) levels of religiosity. The mean value of moderate and high religious groups was markedly higher than the mean value of low religious groups on prosociality. Though the mean value of Muslim youth with a high level of religiosity ($M = 62.167$, $SD = 5.826$) was slightly higher than the moderate religious group, it didn't reach statistical significance. Hence, the participants with high religiosity didn't differ significantly in terms of prosociality from the moderate religious group. But youth with high and moderate religiosity were statistically and significantly different from low religious participants in terms of their prosocial behaviour.

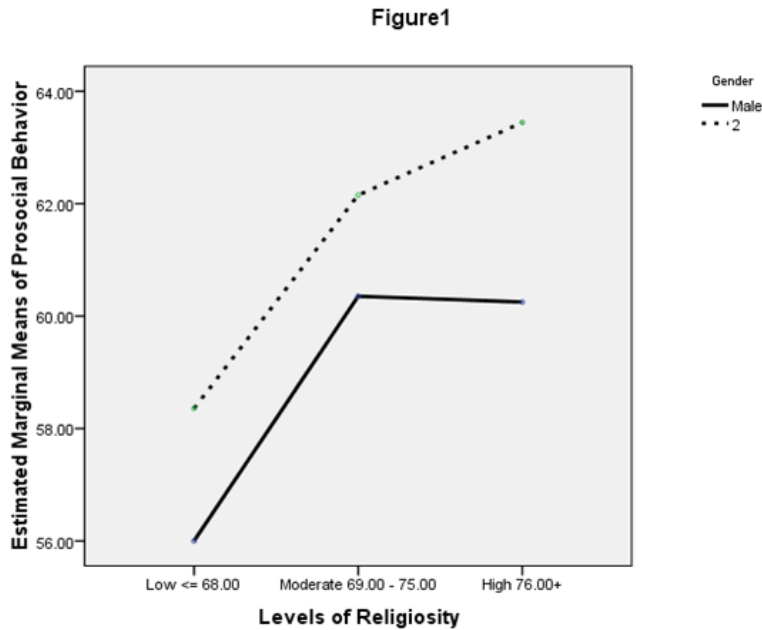


Figure1 shows the mean prosocial scores of males and females across three levels of religiosity (low, moderate and high). An inspection of the graph revealed the absence of interaction effect and difference in the mean prosocial scores for each level of religiosity. Male and female respondents' mean scores were 56.00 and 58.36 at a low; 60.35 and 62.15 at moderate, and 60.25 and 63.44 at a high level of religiosity, respectively. Female participants scored slightly higher than their male counterparts, but the differences were not statistically significant [$F(1, 84) =$

3.140, $p < .05$]; hence male and female participants didn't differ in terms of prosocial behaviour.

Discussion

The present study aimed to determine the effect of gender and religiosity levels on Muslim youth's prosocial behaviour. It is crystal clear from findings that different levels of religiosity have a differential effect on youth's prosocial/ helping behaviour. People with a low level of religiosity significantly differ from those with moderate and high levels of religiosity in their prosocial behaviour. Higher mean scores of people with moderate and high levels of religiosity on prosocial behaviour implied that they were engaged in more prosocial behaviour like sharing, helping, taking care of and feeling empathetic with others compared to participants with a low level of religiosity. Whereas Muslim adults practising moderate and high religiosity didn't differ significantly regarding their prosociality, they engaged in almost the same helping behaviour. This suggests that H02: There will be no significant difference in the prosocial behaviour score for different levels of religiosity is partially supported. The result is in line with the findings of previous studies (Batson et al., 1999; Duriez, 2004; Scheepers et al., 2006), suggesting that religious Muslim adults are more likely to understand and help others than less religious adults. It is, however, worth noting that the Islamic tradition has both mandated and encouraged prosocial behaviour amongst its followers. From the Islamic perspective, all charitable acts reflect a prosocial aspect because this act is an outward behaviour that extends beyond the individual and has at its core the goal of benefitting another person or group of persons being helped but also providing ongoing spiritual benefits to the person engaged in the behaviour.

Moreover, there was no significant effect of gender as male and female participants didn't differ in terms of their prosocial behaviour. The result is consistent with a study by Misra & Yadav (2015), which reported no gender difference in prosocial behaviour. Interaction of gender and levels of religiosity on prosociality was also not significant. Hence, the hypotheses H01: There will be no significant difference in the prosocial behaviour score for males and females and H03: There will be no significant interaction between gender and levels of religiosity in affecting prosocial behaviour are supported.

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the religiousness of an individual has an important effect on helping behaviour. The findings suggest that people with moderate and high levels of religiosity are more likely to engage in helping behaviour than less religious people. Thus, the level of religiosity plays an important role in encouraging a variety of prosocial behaviours among the young Muslim population. The study emphasised the useful effect of religious beliefs and practices in fostering prosocial attitudes and behaviour. It also underlines the importance of the level of religiosity in enhancing the positive psychosocial development of individuals, especially youth.

Further, researchers can take a larger sample group and could go for a cross-sectional study. The researcher could also extend this research by considering certain personality attributes and demographics.

Limitations and Recommendations.

Self-reported measures were used in the present study. Assessing participants' perceptions of their religious beliefs, practices and prosocial behaviours have its own limitations. In-group and out-group helping were not examined in this study. The causal link between the concepts needs further research to understand the path through which religiosity influences prosociality.

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