

## **SUFISM, RELIGIOSITY, LIFE SATISFACTION, HOPE AND OPTIMISM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE DISCIPLES AND NON-DISCIPLES**

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### **Abstract**

*This study assumed that Sufism would have a positive influence that can lead to increase in satisfaction level. In Sufism, the disciple (murid) follows spiritual path under the guidance and supervision of a Sufi-master. This research investigated the relationships of religiosity with life satisfaction, hope and optimism. The study was designed to compare two groups of the disciples (murid) and non-disciples. It was hypothesized that disciples will score higher on life satisfaction and religiosity. The disciples & non-disciples (both enrolled as university students) selected through purposive sampling from the five public sector universities in Peshawar, Pakistan. The Index of Religiosity (IOR; Aziz & Rehman, 1996), Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS; Diener et al., 1985), Adult Hope Scale (AHS; Snyder, et al., 1991), Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R; Scheier, et al., 1994) and Personal Information Sheet was administered to collect the data. The findings of the study revealed a significant difference between the disciples and non-disciples on religiosity and satisfaction with life. Religiosity was found to be*

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*positively related to life satisfaction as well as hope and optimism. This indicates that religiousness and the master-disciple relationship help boost positive emotions. This study has implications for the counselors and psychotherapists to improve the psychological well-being of clients.*

**Key words:** *Sufism/Islamic mysticism, religiosity, life satisfaction, disciples.*

## **Introduction**

Spirituality has become a major concern and central theme among the scholars as well as general public. Psychology of religion is the central focus. William James and G. Stanley Hall, the pioneers of psychology, considered spirituality and religiosity fundamental to this field, though such studies have been marginalized and this has been reported by numerous researchers (Roehlkepartain, 2006).

The empirical studies of religion and spirituality have recurred and more attention has been paid to it in the last twenty years. “The state of the discipline today can be characterized as sufficiently developed but still overlooked, if not neglected, by the whole of psychology” (Hill et al., 2000).

Various dimensions of religiosity researched in numerous studies, in relation to mental health, have gained a lot of attention over the past two decades. The researches on psychiatric patients and community based samples have been conducted showing that religiosity has a positive correlation with mental health (Levin, 2010; Koenig et al., 2012). In another study, Koenig and Larson (2001) proved, “religious beliefs and practices are associated with happiness, higher life satisfaction, and positive affect”.

Almost all major religions hold specific views on the topics like moral behavior, social relations, and human motivation. Although these ideas lack a scientific paradigm, still, offer theoretical background and sufficient information

regarding individual behavior in a specific religious-cultural setting (Smither & Khorsandi, 2009).

Intrinsic religiosity (mysticism) has been related to healing and positive mental health. Offering prayers regularly, and intrinsic religiosity are positively associated with life satisfaction, on the contrary, extrinsic religiosity has relatively less effects on life satisfaction (Salsman et al., 2005).

Sufism (Islamic mysticism) a subdivision of Islamic praxis is passed on from a master (*'shaykh'* literally, “elder” or “old man”) to the disciples. The goal is to modify *'khulq'* (character) of the disciple so that the character of the disciple adapts to the prophetic model. Sufism has been transmitted and traced back to the Holy Prophet Muhammadﷺ through a chain of authorities (known as *silsila*) (Chittick, 2008).

Sufism mainly focuses on human devotion to Allah Almighty and the intrinsic matters (Al-Ghazali, 2014). In Arabic and Persian, numerous terms have been used for Muslim mystics, which come under the umbrella term ‘Sufism’ or *'Tasawwuf'*, which refers to the Islamic practices and a philosophy aiming at directing mystical unification between the man and Allah Almighty (Khanam, 2006; Rabbani, 2005; & Ernst, 1997).

The term “Sufi” has a long history, originated from *'suf'*, referring to the woolen robes used as clothing by the Sufis long ago. The term is also associated with *"safwa"* (the chosen ones) or *"safa"* (purity), which emphasizes the psychological aspect i.e., purifying of the inner self. One more connection is with *"ahly-Suffa"* (people of the bench), means an assemblage of the impoverished Muslims. Sufis have also been called as *Zahid* (ascetic), *Salik* (spiritual traveler),

*Faqir* or *Dervish* (impoverished), *Aashiq* (lover), *Abid* (slave, devotee), and *Arif* (knower of spiritual truth). (Hassanali, 2010; & Ernst, 1997).

The basic aim of Sufism is self-purification, improvement of one's moral conduct, and development of the inner and outer life, to reach eternal ecstasy. The Sufi orders (chains) developed as a structure and the affiliation of the *Murid* (the disciple, seeker) with *Pir*, *Shaykh*, or *Murshid* (spiritual master). Shah (2013), further states that this has been a typical procedure to go after and follow someone who had been through different stages of the spiritual pathway and, therefore, disciples gathered with a renowned master, in search of supervision and guidance through companionship or alliance.

Sufism is absolutely practical, not mere a theory that's why it is accessible to all. The most noticeable Sufi practices include *muraqiba* (meditation) and *zikr* (remembrance of Allah). Sufis also offer supererogatory "extra credit" prayers along with daily obligatory prayers. *Muraqiba* and *zikr* can be performed at any time by anybody, irrespective of ritual purity, age or sex (Ernst, 2003; & Hassanali, 2010).

Though available literature is primarily based on Christianity, however, the present research is being conducted on religion and mental health in Islamic context. Sufism or Islamic mysticism is based on master-disciple relationship, has been overlooked in previous studies, will be explored in the current study. The researches, in this context, suggest that religious people showed improved indicators of mental health. (Abu-Rayyah et al, 2009; Tarakeshwar et al, 2003; & Rosmarin et al, 2009).

In a review of twenty (20) studies on adolescents by Wong et al. (2006), showed positive links found between spirituality and religion in relation to mental

health. Similarly, about 1,024 individuals in the U.S. were assessed and it was found that those who raised in trust-based prayer beliefs experienced boost in satisfaction level of individuals during a three year duration (Krause & Hayward, 2013). Thus, religious engrossment plays a key preventive and beneficial function in relation to psychological distress.

### **Rationale of the Study**

The present study aims to further explore religiosity and satisfaction level in life in relation to optimism and hope; and to identify a positive influence of mystical dimension of religion on life satisfaction, hope and optimism.

According to Hassanali (2010), intellectual and scholastic Sufism is becoming popular among the educated people in urban areas. These modern Sufis are influenced by the earlier (medieval) Sufis and, are rearticulating Islamic metaphysics in response to Western materialism. They state that Islamic revival will begin with the spiritual awakening of individual Muslims.

Sufism is the heart of Islam, as it is seen both as the mystical essence of Islam and an eclectic form of New Age spirituality. As Sufism closely resembles mentorship, in which the spiritual mentor guides and directs the *murids* (disciples) in their daily life hassles consequently relieving their stress, so, recently a trend has been developed that the educated youngsters approach the Sufi masters for seeking guidance and inner satisfaction. Hence, the current study aims to know about the psychological wellbeing of such youth especially the students associated with mysticism.

As there is scarcity of research related to the topic in our country Pakistan and in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. On the contrary, mostly a good number of researches have been carried out on Non-Muslim populations. That's why, it is

necessary to conduct a study on the inhabitants of this particular region. The study will have implications for counselors, clinicians and therapists, in order to adopt certain religious, spiritual and meditative practices like *zikr* and *muraqiba* in their professions that can help improve mental health and promote happiness and wellbeing.

### **Hypotheses**

1. The disciples (subjects connected in a master-disciple relationship) will score higher on Index of Religiosity scale as compared to the non-disciples;
2. The disciples will show higher satisfaction level as compared to the non-disciples;
3. Life satisfaction, religiosity, optimism and hope will be positively correlated.

### **Sample**

The sample comprised of one hundred and sixty four (N=164) including disciples (n=82) & non-disciples (n=82). Purposive sampling technique was applied for data collection in five public sector universities in Peshawar.

### **Inclusion Criteria**

Both disciples and non-disciples had the age range 18 to 45 years, having no past medical history or psychiatric history. However, the disciples were the subjects connected in the master-disciple relationship in Sufism, for at least one year. They have a specific time in daily routine life for *zikr*, remembrance of Allah Almighty. Those who often visit their *shaykh(s)*, attend his sermons and act upon his directives.

## **Measures**

### **Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS)**

A 5-item scale used to assess the level of life satisfaction, having alpha reliability from .75 to .90. SWLS developed by Diener et al. (1985) has been extensively applied in many research studies.

### **Index of Religiosity (IOR)**

IOR (Urdu) is a 27-item having reliability of .83. It is used for the assessment of religiosity on three dimensions (Aziz & Rehman, 1996).

### **Adult Hope Scale (AHS)**

AHS is a 12-item instrument and has demonstrated alpha reliability coefficient of .85. The scale is divided into Pathways and Agency i.e., two subscales (Snyder, et al., 1991).

### **Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R)**

A 10-item instrument used for measuring pessimism and optimism. The scale has demonstrated an alpha coefficient is from .70 to .80 (Scheier et al., 1994).

## **Procedure**

This study has been conducted on two groups i.e., the disciples and non-disciples (both enrolled as students sharing same characteristics). Disciples refers to the individuals having spiritual connection with a Sufi-master, have higher interest and inclination towards religion and spirituality through mystical practices; while non-disciples are those less motivated towards religion and no interest in spirituality in the sense of following mystical rituals and practices as set up by those who went through the mystical journey.

The disciples were approached in various departments and dormitories of selected public sector universities in Peshawar, capital city of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. After taking permission from their wardens and heads of departments, subjects were selected through purposive sampling technique. The non-disciples were selected through the similar process, from the same departments and dormitories.

The subjects were approached individually and goals of the research were clarified. Informed consent was taken and rapport was developed. The Personal Information Sheet was applied to both groups, and were further assessed through Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS), Index of Religiosity (IOR), Life Orientation Test (LOT-R) and Adult Hope Scale (AHS). Subjects were instructed to complete questionnaires honestly. If they found any ambiguity in the questionnaire, they were allowed to ask questions. After returning the questionnaires, respondents were thanked for their cooperation.

## **Results**

**Table-1:** *Mean difference on IOR between the Disciples and Non-Disciples*

Participants	N	M	SD	t-value	p
Disciples	82	73.45	4.93	4.91	0.000
Non-Disciples	82	67.87	8.95		

*The disciples reported higher level of religiosity than non-disciples, the mean difference is significant.*

**Table-2:** *Mean difference on the score of Adult Hope Scale (AHS) between Disciples and Non-Disciples*

Participants	N	M	SD	t-value	p
Disciples	82	49.30	7.22	.968	.335
Non-Disciples	82	48.18	7.62		

*The mean scores of disciples & non-disciples on AHS is not significant.*

**Table-3:** Mean difference on SWLS between the Disciples and Non-Disciples

Participants	N	M	SD	t-value	p
Disciples	82	26.34	4.24	3.915	0.000
Non-Disciples	82	23.86	3.85		

Thus, disciples reported higher level of life satisfaction than non-disciples, the mean difference is significant.

**Table-4:** Mean difference on the scores of LOT-R between Disciples and Non-Disciples

Participants	N	M	S.D	t-value	p
Disciples	82	22.03	3.29	1.376	.171
Non-Disciples	82	21.32	3.28		

Mean difference of disciples & non-disciples on LOT-R is not significant.

**Table-5:** Correlational Analyses (N=164)

	Mean	S.D.	Life Satisfaction	Religiosity	Hope	Optimism
Life Satisfaction	25.10	4.22	1			
Religiosity	70.66	7.72	0.32**	1		
Hope	48.74	7.42	0.36**	0.24**	1	
Optimism	12.59	2.14	0.16*	0.08	0.26**	1

p>0.1; \*p<0.05; \*\*p<0.01

The above table indicates the values of correlation coefficient between religiosity and life satisfaction ( $r = 0.32$ ) life satisfaction and hope ( $r = 0.36$ ) religiosity and hope ( $r = 0.24$ ) optimism and life satisfaction ( $r = 0.16$ ) religiosity and optimism ( $r = 0.08$ ), and optimism and hope ( $r = 0.26$ ).

## Discussion

Positive Psychology is an applied field that aims at exploring such variables that can lead to a fulfilling, contented, and satisfied life. This study indicated that the difference between the disciples and non-disciples on Hope and Optimism Scales was not significant. However, disciples reported higher scores on

religiosity as compared to the non-disciples. Furthermore, it was proved that religiosity is positively correlated with hope, optimism, as well as life satisfaction.

The findings are consistent with enormous studies conducted on Muslim students in many countries. Abdel-Khalek (2010) found religiosity linked with higher subjective wellbeing in Muslim Kuwaiti students. In a research study by Joshanloo (2011) spirituality and religion were both predictors of higher psychological well-being and life satisfaction. This study was conducted on Iranian Muslim College students. In a similar study on Iranian Muslim students, intrinsic religiosity and higher interest in religion were associated with greater happiness and life satisfaction (Aghababaei, 2014).

Tiliouine (2009) also found that spirituality and religiosity contributed to overall life satisfaction. In Algeria, the large research on Muslimsshowed that scoring higher on Islamic religiosity scale (religious altruism and religious practice) revealed slight, positive relations to personal life satisfaction (Tiliouine, Cummins, & Davern, 2009).

Spirituality and religiousness had moderate positive correlations with subjective well-being and life satisfaction as reported by Zullig et al. (2006) and Kelley & Miller (2007). Likewise, religious affiliation resulted in healthier lifestyle choices thus yield positive outcomes, and boost life satisfaction (Ellison, 1991).

In our current study, the disciples scored higher on life satisfaction, which shows that those connected in a spiritual relationship were satisfied with their lives. This result is endorsed by numerous studies on the theme.

Sawatzky et al. (2005), conducted a meta-analysis of 49 research studies found a moderate positive relationship ( $r = 0.34$ ) between spirituality and

an individual's satisfaction with the quality of life. Moreover, the relationship to quality of life was stronger for existential spirituality i.e., 'searching for a sense of meaning in life'.

A meta-analysis of 75 studies, conducted by Yonker et al. (2012) with an aggregate sample 66,273 aged 12–25, both religion and spirituality were associated with favorable psychological outcomes. The findings indicated positive links between self-esteem and faith ( $r = .11$ ) and well-being, including positive mood ( $r = .16$ ), happiness and life satisfaction.

The above discussion predominantly suggests that religiousness is associated with being happy and satisfied with life. These findings also highlight that being personally motivated in one's religion and internalizing the values and beliefs of one's religion are more important to well-being.

The current study has also distinguished between practicing one's religion and mere affiliation with the religion, as the disciples are not only associated with religion but they are involved actively in practicing the religion. According to Levin (2010), "religious involvement exhibits a primary-preventive and beneficial function in relation to psychological distress".

Rizvi, (1989) mentioned: "the modern trends in psychotherapy aims to improve an individual's mental health". Ashraf Ali Thanvi's (1862-1943) approach to normality is normative. He has mainly focused on mental health rather than mental illness. He further explains: "In Islamic perspective, mental health is nearness to God and detachment from God results in mental and functional disorders. If the distance between man and God is lesser, the man will adopt divine attributes and will be more normal. Similarly, the more a person is away from divine qualities, the more the distance is between a person and God".

Jafari (1993) states “spiritual elevation in Islam is caused by submission to God. As a result, God-consciousness and self-awareness are interdependent. Integration of the material and the spiritual life brings about an internal harmony that is the source of mental health and emotional stability. This consciousness leads to the remembrance of God, which is central to the Qur’anic concept of satisfaction and well-being: Al-Qur’an 13:28”.

Intrinsic religiousness is found to be negatively associated with “anxiety”, and positively related with “self-control and better personality functioning”. The correlations were generally not found with irrational beliefs or depression. Around 98.6% students in the current sample were “intrinsic religious” (Bergin et al., 1987).

Ashraf Ali Thanvi stresses on: “joining the company of noble ones for intrinsic development. A disciple is required to be in the company of the Sufi master, listen to his sermons and act upon his directives. Sermon is a counseling means for intrinsic improvement and it is a spiritual clinic”. The Holy Prophet ﷺ narrates: “loneliness is better than bad company and good company is better than loneliness”.

Thanvi further says: “when we advance from doubt to faith, sin to repentance, ignorance to knowledge, hypocrisy to sincerity, negligence to remembrance, lethargy to activity, haughtiness to lowliness and passivity to activity, the soul is pacified and we acquire complete satisfaction. The root of these activities lies in vigilance and a key to them is piety” (Rizvi, 1989).

## **Conclusion**

Intrinsic religiousness has been typically associated with positive mental health and healing. The study assumed that Sufism would have a positive

influence that can lead to increase in life satisfaction, hope and optimism. It is concluded that people can profit from their religion if they actively practice their religion and are concerned with intrinsic aspect i.e. inner purification. It is confirmed from the study that certain religious and spiritual practices can help restore mental health, and can boost positive emotions.

### **Limitations**

- Most of the participants were university students residing in hostel dormitories. People from other walks of life could not be included;
- The younger respondents were more in number than elders;
- The disciples belonged to Sunni school of thought; subjects from Shia school of thought could not be included;
- The Sample size was less; and majority of disciples were associated with *Chishtia* chain of Sufism.

### **Suggestions**

Future research can be conducted to address the aforementioned issues:

- Research study can be conducted on elder people and people from other professions;
- A longitudinal research can be conducted to study psychological changes in the disciples across life span;
- Disciples can be taken from four chains/orders (*salasil*) and a comparative study can be conducted;
- A longitudinal study can be conducted to explore whether religiosity enhances satisfaction with life or life satisfaction increases level of religiosity.

## **Implications of the Study**

Imbalance can occur in mental health and wellbeing, but certain spiritual and meditative practices can restore them and promote happiness. This study has a few implications for therapists:

Therapists can adopt psychospiritual based treatment methods to improve psychological well-being of clients.

Therapists may reflect upon the potentially influential role of faith based emotions in the lives of clients, like feeling loved by God, extending loving-kindness toward others or spiritual gratitude.

Therapists can counsel clients towards involvement in those aspects of their spiritual lives that are most beneficial psychologically.

This study will highlight the significance of specific religious and spiritual practices like “zikr” and “muraqiba” for attaining mental health, and to be incorporated in psychotherapy and counseling.

This study can become a base to develop an indigenous, spiritual based counseling and psychotherapy model which will involve spiritual practices like *zikr* and meditation(s).

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