

Relationship Between Personality Traits, Religiosity and Terrorism Catastrophizing in Young Adults

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Abstract

The question of how people with shared ideological, identities and different personality traits perceive terrorism in a culture where terrorist activities have a strong relationship with religion; addressed through the present research. The aim of the study was to determine the relationship and predictability between the personality traits, religiosity and terrorism catastrophizing across young adults with age range of 18-25 years ($M=20.76$, $SD=1.81$). The present study was a correlational study. With the help of convenient sampling 110 participants were drawn from a Pakistani Cosmopolitan University comprising of (50% men and 50% women). The tools used to measure the three variables under investigation included: Big Five Personality Inventory, The Centrality of Religiosity Scale and Terrorism Catastrophizing Scale, along with the demographic information sheet. Results indicated that extraversion personality trait has an inverse relationship with terrorism catastrophizing and also proved a significant negative predictor. All positive personality factors are significantly positively related with each other whereas negatively related with neuroticism. Present sample of young adults scores equally high on religiosity scale and terrorism catastrophizing scale. However religiosity was not significantly related to terrorism catastrophizing for present sample and also not proved a significant predictor. It is hoped that findings from this research will help in understanding the viewpoint of a cross section of people from Pakistani Cosmopolitan University regarding their perception of terrorism catastrophizing.

Keyword: Personality factors, religiosity, culture, Terrorism catastrophizing, Fear of Future Terrorism

Introduction

In the recent epoch, terrorism has become a major global disquiet. Educational institutions are the most exposed places being besieged by terrorist

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outbreaks. The heightened security procedures and the possibility of being targeted have stirred the feelings of catastrophizing and anguish among students. The present study was designed to examine the relationship of personality traits, role of religiosity and terrorism catastrophizing among young adults who are in their university years. The psychological impact of terrorism is not limited to the immediate aftermath of any attack but anticipating any future attack is also very intimidating (Sinclair & Locicero, 2007).

Terrorism could be defined as use of violence that creates an atmosphere of fear among civilians not only in the direct victims but in a larger audience in order to obtain some political gains (Philip, 2020). The term terrorism is not easy to explain because of difference of opinion and inherent associated stigma. However because of several reasons, terrible atrocities, violent acts or the threat of such actions have plagued human existence for more than millennia. Violence has been used to coerce fear in people to behave in a certain manner is as old as mankind (Mannik, 2009). This phenomenon manifested itself in the form of wars, intolerance, slavery and terrorism to name a few. Furthermore, this human condition crosses barriers and boundaries of class, culture and many time creeds and is viewed as unequivocally evil (Tarlow, 2006).

Keeping in mind the history of wars and conflict, and the emerging spectra of terrorism are defining 21st century in almost all spheres of life, it seems that people may have almost completely lost the sense of value of human life. Intolerance and rigidity in world views and inherited belief systems have in large part created an extremist way of thinking. Terrorism, and the war being fought against it, has become a global flash point of physical as well as ideological conflict between nations and people (Gomes, 2013).

Terrorism in the recent past has become a subject of renewed interest not only in the research community but also within government law enforcement agencies, policy makers and individuals from different walks of life (Borum, 2004). Across the globe almost all the governments are putting in their resources to combat terrorism. To prevent terrorism, government of Pakistan also allocated immense resources. There is a great need of understanding about the true nature of terrorism and how it is creating a long-lasting impact upon general population and how it is enhancing future fear of having another terrorist attack. This lack of understanding gives a way for some very thoughtful challenges in many altitudes. Policymakers are finding it difficult to respond to menace of the emerging terrorism narrative nationwide. At the individual level also it is difficult to predict whether a given person may adopt an extremist idea and consequently pose a serious threat to the people around him.

Despite having a history longer than that of the modern nation-state, the use of terror by government and those that challenge its power remains poorly understood. The term terrorism was originated at the time of Revolution of France. During those days, the term had a different notion that was used as a tool for justice and democracy against the old and oppressive order that was tyrannical in nature (Munson, 2008). However, in today's world terrorism has taken a different shape. Terrorism is not restricted to a certain state or border; it has become a universal problem. Terrorism became more prominent after the attacks of 9/11, 2001 (Nia, 2010).

Terrorists are driven by several motives based on several reasons. As the time passes everything has changed; the terrorists, reasons behind their terrorists' activities and even their motives (Laqueur, 2003). Terrorists do not act irrationally; neither do they have typical risk factor for suicidal acts nor any symptoms of Psychopathology (Bjorgo, 2005). 'Some call themselves freedom fighters and some consider themselves heroic defenders of a worthwhile cause (Mc Donald, 2010).

Although all motivations could be expected for contemporary terrorist attacks, incentives related to religion have been singled out in the 21st century. Extremist belief systems of a mainstream or religious nature are considered to be intermediate cause of terrorism. Although the underlying cause of extremist ideologies is a consequence of personal or political reasons (Bjorgo, 2005). According to D' Souza (2017) though for terrorist attacks related to 9/11 could be explained in terms of politics and issues related to society but religious explanation was the most relevant to design that attack. As the literature related to terrorism deals extensively different opinions on nearly every facet of the terrorist psychology, one feature is strong that we cannot relate only religious fanaticism to terrorism. However, it is also ostensible that terrorism motivated by religion is upsurge. Some researchers suggested suicide bombing with religious beliefs (Berman & Laitin 2005; Hoffman, 2003), while many researches excluded this association (Bloom, 2005; Pape, 2005).

According to Douglas, Hart, Webster and Belfrage (2013) terrorism almost always involves violence and it is well-defined as real, tried or intentional physical harm to the people. Group-based violence is also a subcategory of terrorism which includes terrorist groups and organized criminal groups (World Health Organization, 2002). A group refers to more than two people who are associated in a collective and distinct manner through shared norms, goals, beliefs, or attitudes. This definition covers all the types of violence that are covered in the literature. This is the need of the hour to understand Group Based Violence (GBV). There are two forms of GBV including violence by criminals and violence

by terrorist organizations which at present time a big challenge for the people who are responsible for public safety due to its frequency that is on the rise (Krug, Mercy, Dahlberg, & Zwi, 2002)

Personality could be described with various theoretical frameworks and in a variety of dimensions. Some psychologists describe personality as a product of different stages in life and some psychologists took traits and facets concept of personality (McAdams & Pals 2006; John, Hampson, & Goldberg, 1991). All these schools of thought contributed immensely to understanding of personality. For present study basic framework given by McCrae and Costa (1992) was implied and five factors of personality including extraversion, openness, conscientiousness, neuroticism, and agreeableness was studied. The factor Extraversion usually measure level of energy, sociability and assertiveness among people. Those who are high on this personality factor will derive its energy from making interaction with other peoples. The factor called openness included creativity, imagination insightfulness and a variety of interests. People who scored high on conscientiousness will be very methodic, prompt, well organized and thorough. Whereas people who scored high on neuroticism will be highly vulnerable to stress, anxiety and other negative emotionality. Agreeableness is a positive trait that included affection, kindness and compassion (McCrae & Costa, 1992).

During the 21st century our global family is insecure and fearful due to the continuous happenings of terrorists' activities around the world. The upsurge of terrorist activities yet remains an enigma for researchers. There are many explanations of all these terrorists' activities but the question is still unanswered that whether the fear of future terrorism enhanced with particular personality traits and religious inclinations of the people or there are some other potential factors for this. There are many researches which explained the relationship between religiosity, spirituality and mental health but there is not much research for the religiosity by itself and its relationship with personality traits. Alminhana and Moreira- Almeda (2009) found that high religiosity is associated high levels of agreeableness and conscientiousness whereas with low levels of psychosis. With the help of Eysenck's model of personality traits and its relationship to spirituality, Maltby and Day (2001) concluded high level of extraversion is associated with religiosity and spirituality. The present research study aimed to understand the psychology behind the fear of future terrorism which ultimately catastrophize the terrorism and also examine if there is any role of personality traits and religiosity present in it.

Hypotheses

- There will be a positive relationship between neuroticism and terrorism catastrophizing and inverse relationship with all other personality traits.
- There will be an inverse relationship between religiosity and terrorism catastrophizing
- Religiosity and positive personality factors will negatively whereas neuroticism will positively predict terrorism catastrophizing.

Method

Research design:

The study design for present research was correlational.

Sample:

The sample consisted of undergraduate students at a private university in Lahore. Through convenient sampling, 110 participants were selected. The age range of the participants was 18-25 ($M=20.76$, $SD=1.81$). People with different ethnicity were also included i.e. Punjabies, Pathans, Sindies and Balochies. Equal number of Muslims and Christians were participated in present research. They were matched for age, socio economic status and subject of study majors.

Measures:

The following measures were used in the current study along with the demographic information sheet.

Big Five Inventory(John & Srivastava, 1999)

A brief measure for assessment of five factors of personality was used which contains 44 items. The five factors of personality include extroversion, agreeableness, and openness to experience, neuroticism and conscientiousness. All psychometric properties i.e. reliability, validity and standardization made the test adequate to use for present research study.

The Centrality of Religiosity Scale(Huber& Huber, 2012)

The test was designed to measure the centrality and salience of religious meaning in personality. There are ten statements that measure religious centrality and importance containing two questions per dimension. Including private practice, public practice, intellectual dimension, ideology and religious experience. It is a highly reliable test and reliability ranging from 0.89 to 0.94.

Terrorism Catastrophizing Scale (Sinclair & LoCicero, 2007)

It comprised of thirteen items which measures three dimensions of terrorism fear including rumination, magnification and helplessness. The cut off score was 33 that can range from 13 to 65. All psychometric properties were good enough to apply this scale.

Procedure:

A consent form was signed by the participants prior to giving them the questionnaire. Participants were the students at a private university in Lahore Pakistan. They were approached separately and the filling of the forms was done on individual basis to ensure anonymity. An Informed consent was signed by the participant which was an official contract with the individual that his/her privacy and confidentiality will not be breached. If they had any questions related to the study or their rights, the researcher addressed them during, before or after the study. The participants were also informed about the confidentiality and debriefed (about the study) verbally about the purpose of the study. Furthermore, they were informed about voluntary participation. The participants had a right to withdraw at any point during their voluntary participation without being under obligation to explain any reason for doing so. For the completion of the questionnaires, 30 minutes were required for each participant. After the participants were done the researcher checked the questionnaires for missing items and if any items were missing, the participants were requested to fill out the questionnaire again. However, if they refused to fill it out, the unfilled ones were discarded by shredding them. Before the data was collected, Institutional Research Board and Board of studies Psychology Department, Forman Christian College approved the present study. The data collected was analyzed objectively through SPSS version 20.

Results**Table 1***Descriptive Analysis of the Study Variables (N=110)*

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>a</i>
Extraversion	27.52	4.06	17.00	37.00	.62
Agreeableness	30.56	4.44	17.00	43.00	.58
Conscientiousness	30.68	4.21	19.00	40.00	.65
Neuroticism	26.52	3.76	14.00	36.00	.59
Openness	37.60	6.38	24.00	64.00	.64
Religiosity	25.74	9.33	11.00	56.00	.76
Terrorism	38.19	7.25	19.00	52.00	.64

Note: *a* = Cronbach Alpha

Cronbach Alpha revealed that all the scales and subscales have adequate internal reliability, so further analyses can be executed with confidence. Mean scores of personality factors depicted those participants obtained high scales on positive personality traits whereas low scores on neuroticism. The mean scores of

religiosity and terrorism catastrophizing scales indicated that participants obtained scores above the cut off which means they were equally high on religiosity but also have high terrorism catastrophizing.

Table 2: Relationship between Personality Factors, Religiosity and Terrorism Catastrophizing (N=110)

Variables	2	3	4	5	6	7
1.Extraversion	.396**	.475**	-.253**	.444**	-.119	- .192**
2.Agreeableness		.443**	-.432**	.460**	-.130	-.143
3.Conscientiousness			. - 286**	.436**	-.036	.014
4.Neuroticism				-.196**	-.038	-.053
5.Openness					-.110	-.041
6.Religiosity						.117
7.Terrorism						

Note: *p<.05, **p<.01,

Results of correlation analysis revealed that all positive personality factors are significantly related with each other and negatively related with neuroticism. Likewise extraversion has a significant inverse relationship with the terrorism catastrophizing.

Table 3: Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Terrorism Catastrophizing as outcome variable and Personality Factors and Religiosity as Predictors(N=110)

Predictors	Terrorism Catastrophizing	
	ΔR^2	β
STEP 1	.006	
Gender		-.052
Step 2	.017	
Extraversion		-.247*
Agreeableness		-.153
Conscientiousness		-.177
Neuroticism		.011
Openness		.061
Step 3	.018	
Religiosity		.086
TOTAL ΔR^2	0.22	

Note: * $p < .05$

Results of regression analysis revealed that only extraversion proved a significant predictor for terrorism catastrophizing in present population.

Discussion:

Terrorism became more prominent after the attacks of September 11, 2001. Terrorists do not act irrationally; neither do they have typical risk factor for suicidal acts nor any symptoms of Psychopathology. Some terrorists call themselves freedom fighters and some consider themselves heroic defenders of a worthwhile cause. Along with extremist belief systems of a mainstream or religious nature are considered to be intermediate cause of terrorism. Although the underlying cause of ideological extremisms is a result of personal or political reasons (Kingsley, O, 2010)

Present study results are also in hand with the previous researches as far as the personality factors are concerned. Extraversion is inversely related and also negatively predicted to the terrorism catastrophizing. Results also indicated that not a statistically significant relationship existed between personality traits and religiosity for present sample. One study conducted based on the vote-counting method, revealed that religiosity is related only with low psychoticism and increase agreeableness and conscientiousness, while not significantly related with other personality factors. The Meta analysis also depicted that religiosity is also connected with extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness (Saroglou, 2002). In another study conducted to see the relationship between religious beliefs and personality traits by Khoynezhad, Rajaei, & Sarvarazemy, (2012) found positive connection between religious beliefs and extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness. Alminhana & Moreira- Almeda (2009) also found a significant relationship between religiosity and positive traits of personality e.g. agreeableness and extraversion and inverse relationship with neuroticism.

Present study results indicated that religiosity is not related with terrorism catastrophizing. The people who are religious or not there is no relationship how they perceive the future terrorists' activities. The direction of present results is not in line with research conducted in different western countries. It might be due to different reason for example the tools used to measure the three variables under investigation were developed by American authors and were not culture-specific to Pakistan. Many items may have been interpreted differently by individuals that participated in the study. The studies in the review of the literature also took place outside Pakistan. This shows that the tools were not culturally specific.

Pakistan thrives on its culture and the culture in the east is very much family oriented and collectivist in nature. This may affect the way Pakistani

people are brought up and how their personalities are shaped. The scale to measure religiosity was originally developed to measure religiosity in the context of the Abrahamic tradition which contains a monotheistic concept of God including Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. God is considered as a counter part of humans in this approach (Huber & Huber 2012). The concept of religion and religious activities are more related to spirituality and mystical experiences in eastern culture and also of immense significance. It has been seen the review of the literature that more often than not the people from the East are rigid in their ideologies and beliefs. For them, the truth is what has been there for thousands of years and not to be challenged irrespective of its fading validity in modern times (Antoun, 2008). The emerging adults in a cosmopolitan educational institute may not perceive the study variables as the previous literature shown. There may be other explanations which could be a topic of future researches in this field. The perception of religion may be different in present times and hence, how it shapes our personalities.

Conclusions

For present sample it is concluded that extraversion personality trait has an inverse relationship with terrorism catastrophizing and also proved a significant predictor. However religiosity is not significantly related to terrorism catastrophizing. The research aimed to understand the perspective of a diverse group of young adults which may not aligned with western literature. For finding to be more accurate and culturally specific, this paper is open for more research and discussion.

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