

CORRELATION OF RELIGIOUS BEHAVIOUR AND SELF-ESTEEM OF THE MUSLIM GIRL STUDENTS OF IRANIAN HIGH SCHOOLS

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Introduction

The adolescents and youngsters do need a sanctuary in their lives, so that they might be able to take refuge in it, seek help from it and live peacefully counting on its support in all events of their life (Alaqeh Band, 1997).

Stanley Hall believes that the adolescents have their maximum religious feelings when they are 15 years old (Khodayari, 2001). Therefore, religion is more important for youngsters. They show a particular interest towards religion in the beginning of their puberty. These attitudes are mainly natural, and may also spring from family, friends or religious studies or propaganda (Mirzai, 1994). Psychology, which is connected with religion, plays an important role in the formation of the children's and adolescents' personalities (Parsa, 1993). Religious attitudes and behaviours have a mutual relationship. Religious attitudes, like belief in God, cause religious behaviours, such as establishing prayer or helping the poor. On the other hand, religious behaviours strengthen the religious attitudes (Karimi, 1999).

Self-esteem is an important aspect of life and directly linked to what we do or do not do in life. President Harold B. Lee, in his last General conference as President of the Church, taught: Rebellion in the land, disorder and the lack of love in the family, children disobedient to parents, loss of contact with God, all because that person has lost all respect for himself (Top and Chadwick, 2003).

Religiosity has been virtually ignored, at best, or totally dismissed, at worst, as a contributing factor to self-esteem (Top and Chadwick, 2003). Self-esteem can often affect various aspects of the life of people (Biyabangard, 2001). One cannot mention even one psychological disorder that doesn't stem from the weakness of self-esteem (Branden, 1996; Shamlu, 1989). If the characteristics of the life environment are not conducive to the growth of the individual's self-esteem, it may lead to the feeling of distress, frustration and exclusion in that individual (Mansoor, 1990). Self-esteem causes a person to consider himself important and valuable and can see that he or she is able to manage his own life (Neinavai, 1993). But the distance between the "perceived ego" and the "ideal ego" causes the self-esteem to decrease (Afroz, 1993).

Adolescence is a difficult stage as young people seek independence from parents, despite not yet knowing who they really are. Self-esteem is an important factor during those junior and senior high school years (Top and Chadwick, 2003). Research shows that the peak time for low self-esteem is in the middle to late adolescence (Nunley, 2001, quoted in Thames). Unfortunately, this has led to an increase in teen pregnancy, drug abuse, alcoholism, depression and suicide. All these issues are extremely important to society as a whole. Research must be done to determine, not only causes for low self-esteem, but also ways to prevent or correct it (Thames, undated). Tarkhan (1993) and Biabangard (1991) reported a positive and meaningful correlation between self-esteem and educational achievement of the high school students. Alavi and Askari Pour (2003) concluded that there was a positive relationship between self-esteem and the job-satisfaction of people.

Religiosity is the second strongest inhibitor of suicide, alcohol use, sexual involvement, and interpersonal violence in adolescence (Donahue and Benson, 1995, cited in Thames). Comestak and Partidge (1972) reported that those persons who do not participate in the church ceremonies are four times more likely to commit suicide as compared with those who participate regularly in these ceremonies. Stake (1983) believes that religion, through increasing the self-esteem, helps people not to commit suicide. Genia (1996) found that the inner religiosity has a negative correlation with depression, and those who do not go to church at all, or do not believe in the religion, are more likely to be attacked by psychological disorders. Inner religiosity has relationship with mental health and is accompanied by high self-esteem and a positive image of God.

Puryusofi (1982) reported a high score for the religiosity of the Muslim university students in Michigan University. Yahya (1988) found that a large ratio of the respondents in Michigan were religious or highly religious. Taleban (1998) concluded that 83% of the high school students had a high religiosity. Saraj Zadeh (1996) reported the total scores of religiosity of the high school students were 3.57 on a scale of 5. Alavi (2000) reported a relatively desirable situation for the religious performance and behaviour of the high school students. Shir Shahi (1999) concluded that the female students' religious attitudes were better than those of the male students. Majidi Far (2001) found that there was no meaningful difference between the religious attitude of the ordinary and gifted (intelligent) students. Sheikh Bahai (2001) reported a high religious behaviour for the high school students.

Adler (quoted from Khobari Banab, 1995) reported that depression decreases in those people who go to church and worship God privately. Gass (cited in Bahrami Mashuf, 1994) reported a negative correlation between religious faith with psychological and emotional disorders. In other words, religious values can help people to cope with psychological and emotional problems.

Thames (undated) found no significant correlation between religiosity and self-esteem of the participants from three high schools and one church youth group in southeast Louisiana. Dai, Nolan and Zeng (2001) reported that religious involvement had the largest influence on self-esteem of young adolescents who participated in religious activities. The largest percentage of eighth graders who participated in religious activities also reported the highest self-esteem (very involved - 612, involved - 183, slightly involved - 280, not at all involved - 186).

According to Top and Chadwick (2003), religiosity was directly linked to academic achievement. The more religious and spiritual a teenager is, the better

he/she will do in school and the greater will be the desire for more education. There was also a powerful relationship between religiosity and self-esteem among the teenagers. The more religious they were, the higher their self-esteem—the better they feel about themselves and the more they possess self-confidence.

It appears that not much research has been done in Iran on the relationship between religious (Islamic) behaviour and self-esteem of the Muslim adolescent girls of high schools. The importance of this research is that we can identify the measures of the religious behaviour and self-esteem of the students, and then plan to increase and improve these two variables if needed. Also, if we find a positive relationship between these two variables, we can plan for increasing the self-esteem of the students, through improving their religious behaviour.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to identify the measure of religious behaviour and self-esteem and their relationship in the Muslim girl students of Iranian high schools. In this research, “religious behaviour” means “Islamic behaviour”, that is, Islamic practices such as establishing prayer (*ṣalāt*), fasting in Ramaḍān, reciting the Qur’ān, etc. It also means “self-confidence”, “self-respect” or the score obtained from completing the Rosenberg self-esteem questionnaire. To accomplish the above goals the following questions were designed:

- (1) What is the measure of religious behaviour of the Muslim girl students of Iranian high schools?
- (2) What is the measure of self-esteem of the Muslim girl students of Iranian high schools?
- (3) What is the correlation between religious behaviour and self-esteem of the Muslim girl students of Iranian high schools?

Methodology

The research method used in this study was descriptive-correlational. It was descriptive, because one of the goals of the research was to describe the situations of “religious behaviour”, and “self-esteem” of the students as they were. On the other hand, the research method was correlational, because the other goal of the research was to determine the correlation between “religious behaviour” and “self-esteem”.

The statistical population was all the Muslim girl students of high schools of Kerman, in grades one, two and three totalling 15946 students in the academic year 2003-2004. Stratified random sampling method was used for choosing 585 students as the research sample. Two different questionnaires for the assessment of the research variables were given to 600 students, 585 questionnaires of which were returned to the researchers. The first questionnaire was for the assessment of “religious behaviour”, which had questions for the assessment of such variables as the measure of the students’ participation in congregational prayers and Friday (Jum’ah) prayers in the mosque, their participation in mosque sessions, offering prayer, reciting the Qur’ān, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān. The second questionnaire of the research was for measuring the self-esteem of the students. Rosenberg questionnaire which had 10 questions was used in this regard.

The validity of the religious behaviour questionnaire was calculated to be 0.7815 and the validity of the self-esteem questionnaire was calculated to be 0.94 using the viewpoints of 5 assistant professors of the educational sciences and

psychology of Shahid Bahonar University of Kerman. The reliability of the religious behaviour questionnaire was determined as 0.935 by Pearson test and 0.904 by Spearman test, and the reliability of the self-esteem questionnaire was determined as 0.814 using test-retest method. Spearman correlation test was used for measuring the relationship between “religious behaviour” and “self-esteem” of the students.

Results

According to the data analysis, the self-esteem of 3.4 percent of the students was very undesirable, 12.1 percent undesirable, 26.7 percent was relatively desirable, 33.7 percent was desirable and 24.1 percent was very desirable (Table1).

Table1 Frequency distribution of students' self-esteem

Self-esteem	Frequency	Percentage
Very undesirable	20	3.4
Undesirable	71	12.1
Relatively desirable	156	26.7
Desirable	197	33.7
Very desirable	141	24.1
Total	585	100.0

According to the data analysis, the religious behaviour of 1 percent of the students was undesirable, 5.5 percent was relatively desirable, 30.1 percent was desirable, 63.4 percent was very desirable. One student did not answer the questions (Table 2).

Table 2 Frequency distribution of students' religious behaviour

Religious behaviour	Frequency	Percentage	Percentage of the respondents
Undesirable	6	1	1
Relatively desirable	32	5.5	5.5
Desirable	176	30.1	30.1
Very desirable	370	63.2	63.4
Total	584	99.8	100
Incomplete (no answer)	1	0.2	
Grand Total	585	100	

Since the Spearman correlation coefficient and its significance level was calculated 0.157 and 0.000 respectively, therefore, the null hypothesis based on lack of correlation between the two variables is rejected, that is, there is a positive and meaningful relationship between the students' religious behaviour and self-esteem. In other words, the more desirable is the students' religious behaviour, the more desirable will be their self-esteem (Table 3; Diagram 1).

Table 3. Relationship between religious behaviour and self-esteem

	Self esteem		
	Spearman correlation	Significance level	Frequency
Religious behaviour	0.157	0.000	582

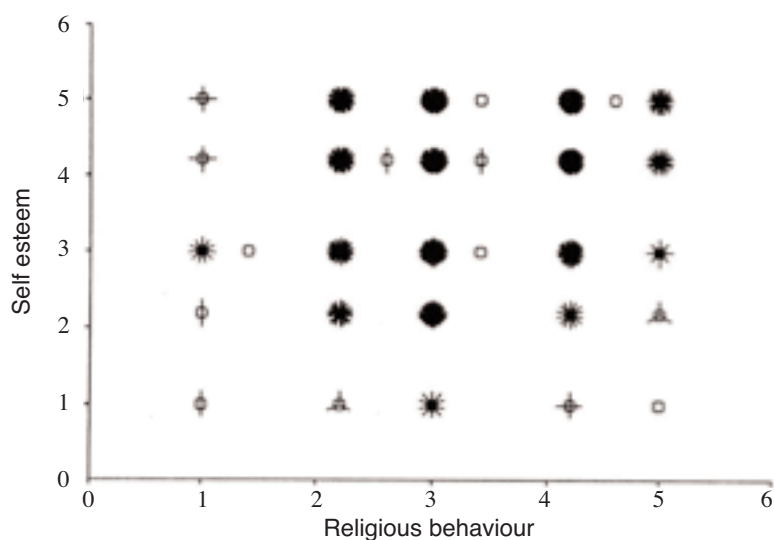


Diagram1. Variance of self-esteem and religious behaviour

Discussion and Conclusion

It was concluded in this research that religious behaviour of the high school Muslim girl students was “relatively desirable”. This result is consistent with the results of the researchers Seraj Zadeh (1996), Taleban (1998), Shir Shahi (1999), Alavi (2000), Sheikh Behai (2001) and Majidi Far (2001). Also, the high measure or the relatively high measure of the students’ religious behaviour has been confirmed by most of the worldwide researches (Puryusofi, 1983, Yahya Alavi, 2003).

It was also concluded in this research that the self-esteem of the high school Muslim girl students was “desirable”. Another conclusion was that there was a positive and meaningful correlation between religious behaviour and self-esteem of the Muslim girl students of Iranian high schools. It means that we can expect an improvement in the students’ self-esteem by improving their religious behaviour. In other words, such Islamic behaviours as establishing prayer, fasting in the month of Ramaḍān, reciting the Qur’ān, participation in the congregational prayer, Jum’ah prayer, and other ceremonies in the mosque can increase or improve the self-esteem of the Muslim girl students in the Iranian high schools. Religiosity has different benefits which can directly or indirectly contribute to the individuals’ self-esteem. For example, according to many new researches all over the world (Martin, 2005,

Hoggard, 2005; Nettle, 2005; Nodding, 2005) religiosity can improve the sense of security in people by connecting them to God; it reduces different psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression; it can help individuals to cope with different life problems and challenges such as poverty; it can cultivate the emotional and social aspects of human personalities by connecting them to one another in religions group activities; it can increase happiness in people; it can help people to be more satisfied and have more positive feelings about their life, religion and health.

According to Hoggard (2005), benefits of religion can be broadly divided into four factors: social support, spiritual support, a sense of purpose and meaning, and the avoidance of risky and stressful behaviours. Doing good works through acts of charity provides another sense of connection to community. Often religion can help us feel more included in society, which can give us a sense of community cohesion. Often religion can help us feel more included in society, and it can give us a sense of being united and a feeling of continuity in life. Believers say that their faith can relieve stress in difficult times, such as illness, divorce and bereavement.

They also have a lower level of anxiety about their own death because of their belief in an afterlife. In addition, faith can also be a powerful buffer against the effects of social and economic deprivation. It helps us to think beyond our own selfish interests. When one feels that he has been able to observe God's commandments, and do his spiritual duties and responsibilities or when he sees that he can take part in group religious ceremonies, he will be more prepared to accept his own abilities, and therefore, his self-respect and so his self-esteem will be increased. He feels that he has reached the desired goal, and has not been defeated in the way of achieving his purpose and thus he does not feel frustrated.

The role of religion or religiosity on improvement of self-esteem has been confirmed by most of the worldwide researches (Stake, 1983; Genia, 1996; Dai, Nolan and Zeng, 2001; Top and Chodwick, 2003). According to the results of this research, since it was concluded that the religious behaviour of high school Muslim girl students was "relatively desirable", it is suggested that much more effort need to be made to improve the religious behaviour of these student to "very desirable" as far as possible. Also, since it was concluded in this research that there was a positive and meaningful relationship between religious behaviour and self-esteem of the students, therefore it is suggested that to increase the students' self-esteem, their religious (Islamic) behaviour should be improved.

It is also suggested that this work can be followed up by further investigation of the correlation of other aspects of religiosity such as religious attitude, etc. and self-esteem or other psychological factors of the high school and university Muslim students in Iran and other countries.

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