

Religious Orientation, Pro-Social Behavior and Psychological Flourishing in University Students

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The study aimed to investigate the relationship among religious orientation, pro-social behavior, and psychological flourishing in university students. Two hundred students of ages 18 to 24 years ($M = 20.32$, $SD = 2.128$) were recruited. Assessment measures used were demographic form, Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967), The Pro-Sociality Scale (Caprara, 2005), and The Flourishing Scale (Diener et al., 2010). The results revealed a significant relationship between extrinsic personal religious orientation, pro-social behavior, and psychological flourishing in college and university students. Regression analysis indicated that extrinsic personal religious orientation and pro-social behaviors predict psychological flourishing significantly positively. Moreover, it was found that pro-social behaviors significantly mediate the relationship between Intrinsic Religious Orientation and psychological flourishing.

Keywords. Religious orientation, Pro-social behavior, Psychological flourishing, college and university students

Religion affects lives of the believers both personally and socially. The literature revealed that religious orientation, prosocial behavior, and psychological flourishing among college students are strongly related. Because it fosters internalized moral norms, empathy, and social responsibility, religious orientation—especially intrinsic religiosity—has been proven to significantly predict prosocial behaviors. For example, a study conducted on college students found that prosocial behavior was positively correlated with higher religious inclination, and that this correlation was reinforced by moral and emotional processes (Kausar et al., 2023). Moreover, an intervention for pro-social behaviors boosted psychological flourishing. It indicates

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that pro-social behaviors positively predict psychological flourishing. Furthermore, psychological flourishing enhances the well-being and mental health of students. Hence, it is important to study the relationship between religious orientation (RO), pro-social behaviors, and Psychological flourishing in university students.

Religious orientation (RO) can be defined as the beliefs of an individual about the nature and existence of God. Two basic dimensions of religious orientation were: extrinsic and intrinsic religious orientation. Intrinsic religious orientation (INRO) is the extent to which an individual embraces religion as an end unto itself, while extrinsic religiousness is the extent to which an individual uses religion as a means to some end ([Trimble, 1997](#)). Extrinsic religious orientation (EXRO) is of two types: extrinsic personal religious orientation (EXPRO) and extrinsic social religious orientation (EXSRO). Personal is related to oneself and social is related to others. The researcher reported that adults with high levels of INRO and EXRO experience more psychological flourishing ([Abdollahi et al., 2018](#)). Moreover, Religious orientation is positively related to pro-social behaviors ([Kausar et al., 2023](#)).

Prosocial behaviors can be defined as behaviors that are beneficial for others. Such behaviors include sharing, helping, and showing empathy. Prosocial behaviors can be divided into three types: altruistic, proactive, and reactive. Proactive prosocial actions are related to the self-interest, status, and reputation of the person. Reactive prosocial actions are often performed in response to social pressure. Altruistic prosocial actions refer to helping others without expectation ([Wittek & Bekkers, 2015](#)). [Nelson and colleagues \(2016\)](#) reported that prosocial behaviors positively predict psychological flourishing.

Psychological flourishing refers to positive psychological and social functioning. The concept of psychological flourishing is based on the PERMA model, which comprises positive emotions, engagement with others, relationships, meaning in life, and accomplishments. In short, psychological flourishing is related to feeling good about oneself and functioning optimally ([Las Heras et al., 2022](#)).

The broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions, religious coping approaches, and self-determination theory provide a tenable theoretical framework for comprehending why prosocial behaviors mediate the relationship between intrinsic religiosity and flourishing. [Gordon Allport \(1950\)](#) defined intrinsic religiosity as a genuine, internalized commitment to religious beliefs that motivates people to

live by moral principles like empathy, compassion, and charity. These internalized ideals encourage prosocial actions (such as lending a hand, sharing, and volunteering), which are outward manifestations of religious dedication. The self-determination hypothesis of Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (2000) states that intrinsically driven acts improve flourishing by meeting fundamental psychological demands for relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Similarly, good, other-oriented activities increase people's social and emotional resources, which support long-term thriving, according to Barbara Fredrickson's broaden-and-build hypothesis (2001). This pathway is supported by empirical research; for example, studies by Martin Seligman and Christopher Peterson show a robust correlation between prosocial involvement and greater levels of life satisfaction and psychological well-being (Peterson et al., 2005). Furthermore, prosocial behavior predicts flourishing outcomes including purpose in life, meaningful relationships, and emotional well-being (Aknin et al., 2013; Diener et al., 2010), and religiosity has been consistently associated with prosocial tendencies (Saroglou, 2013). Because prosocial behavior operationalizes religious principles into activities that directly promote psychological and social well-being, it serves as a crucial mechanism via which intrinsic religiosity transforms into enhanced psychological flourishing. Jaffery and colleagues (2021) reported significant positive relationships between religiosity and psychological flourishing. In addition, volunteerism mediated the relationship between religiosity and flourishing. Therefore, the study investigated prosocial behaviors as a mediator between RO and psychological flourishing.

Research on these factors in non-Western and collectivistic cultural contexts, where religion frequently plays a major role in day-to-day existence and social interaction, is rare. By focusing on college and university students within this context, this study aims to provide culturally relevant insights and contribute to the larger literature by providing evidence from an underrepresented population. Pro-social behavior, which is frequently encouraged by religious teachings, represents a plausible mediating factor, but it has not been sufficiently explored in this context.

Objectives

The study aimed to:

Assess the relationship among religious orientation, pro-social behaviors, and psychological flourishing in college and university students. Investigate the predictors of psychological flourishing in university students.

Hypotheses

1. There is likely to be a significant positive relationship between RO (INRO, EXPRO, EXSRO), pro-social behaviors and psychological flourishing in university students.
2. The pro-social behaviors and religious orientation (INRO, EXPRO, and EXSRO) are likely to be significant predictors of psychological flourishing in university students.
3. Pro-social behavior is likely to mediate the relationship between INRO and psychological flourishing in university students.
4. Females are likely to score more on psychological flourishing than males in university students.

Method

Sample

The sample comprised two hundred university students. They were 18-24 years old. Equal number of male and female students were recruited. Similarly, hundred students were recruited from college and hundred students were recruited from university. One hundred and twenty six students were masters students and seventy four were graduation students. Regular students were recruited. They were recruited by using convenient sampling. Prior to data collection approval was taken from concerned authorities. Participants were also informed about the research and their rights. Students suffering from any physical disability or psychological disorder were excluded from the study.

Measures

Demographic Sheet

It was used for getting demographic information which included age, gender, education, marital status, residence, religion, RO, parent's occupation, parent's income, family environment, relationship with parents, relationship with siblings, and helping others.

Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967)

It was used to measure two types of RO: INRO and EXRO. EXRO is further divided into two categories EXPRO and EXSRO. It comprises 14 items. Items were scored on a five-point Likert scale

ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Urdu version of the scale was used for data collection adapted by [Khan and colleagues \(2016\)](#). The reliability of the scale was .71.

The Pro-Sociality Scale

It was used to measure pro-sociality. It comprises 16 items. It has four subscales: helping, caring, sharing, and empathy. Each item is rated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Never) to 5 (very often). Urdu version of the scale was used for data collection ([Shahid & Noor-ul-Ain, 2024](#)). Cronbach alpha of the scale was .91 ([Caprara, 2005](#)).

The Flourishing Scale

It was used to measure flourishing. It comprises eight items. It has four subscales: relationships, the purpose of life, optimism, and self-esteem. Items are rated on a seven-point Likert scale that ranges from strongly disagree (0) to strongly agree (6). Urdu version of the scale was used ([Choudhry et al., 2018](#)). The reliability of this scale is .76 ([Diener et al., 2010](#)).

Procedure

Before collecting data, permissions were taken from authors of the scales. Official permission was taken from the concerned authorities for data collection. The purpose of the research was explained to the participants before taking consent. Only those participants were included who fulfilled the inclusion criteria and were willing to participate. They were assured about the confidentiality of the responses as well as the right to withdraw from the research at any time without any penalty. Data analysis was done by using SPSS version 23.

Results

The study aimed to assess the relationship between RO, pro-social behavior, and psychological flourishing in university students. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a positive relationship among RO, pro-social behavior, and psychological flourishing in university students. Pearson product-moment correlation was used to analyze the hypothesis. Results are shown in [Table 1](#).

Table 1. *Correlation among Religious Orientation, Pro-Social Behavior, and Psychological Flourishing in College and University Students (N = 200)*

S. Variables No	1	2	3	4	5	6
1 In. Religious Orientation Scale	-	.493**	.597**	.288**	.169*	.101
2 Ex. Religious Orientation Scale		-	.571**	.909**	.028	.134
3 Ex. Personal Religious Orientation Scale			-	.177**	.114	.183**
4 Ex. Social Religious Orientation Scale				-	-.024	.067
5 Pro-Sociality Scale.					-	.301**
6 Flourishing Scale						-

Note. In. ROS= Intrinsic Religious Orientation scale, Ex. ROS= Extrinsic Religious Orientation scale, Ex. PROS= Extrinsic Personal Religious Orientation scale, Ex. SROS= Extrinsic Social Religious Orientation scale, PSS= Pro-Sociality Scale, FS= Flourishing scale.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table revealed a significant positive relationship among EXPRO, pro-social behaviors, and psychological flourishing in university students. Moreover, it was assumed that RO and pro-social behavior are likely to predict psychological flourishing in university students. Regression analysis was used to test this hypothesis. Results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. *Religious Orientation and Pro-Social Behavior as a Predictor of Psychological Flourishing (N = 200)*

Predictors	Psychological Flourishing				
	B	SE	β	95% CI	
Constant	10.61	9.64		-8.40	29.63
In. Religious Orientation Scale	-.28	.32	-.07	-.91	.35
Ex. Personal Religious Orientation Scale	1.36*	.62	.19*	.14	2.57
Ex. Social Religious Orientation Scale	.24	.26	.06	-.27	.76
Pro-Sociality Scale	.30***	.07	.29***	.16	.44
ΔR^2	.12***				
F	6.59***				

Note. B = Unstandardized Coefficients, SE = Standard Error, β = Standardized Coefficients, CI = Confidence Interval, LL = Lower Limit, UL = Upper limit, $\Delta R^2 = R^2$ Change, In. ROS= Intrinsic Religious Orientation Scale, Ex. PROS= Extrinsic Personal Religious Orientation Scale, Ex. SROS= Extrinsic Social Religious Orientation Scale, PSS= Pro-Sociality Scale.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Assumptions of normality, multicollinearity were met. Results indicate that EXPRO and pro-social behavior are significant positive predictors of psychological flourishing in university students. Furthermore, it was hypothesized that prosocial behaviors will mediate the relationship between INRO and psychological flourishing. PROCESS analysis was used to check mediation. Results are shown in [Table 3](#).

Table 3. *Prosocial Behaviors as a Mediator between Intrinsic Religious Orientation and Psychological Flourishing (N = 200)*

Types	Estimates	SE	95% CI		t	p
			LL	UL		
Indirect Effect	.18	.09	.03	.37		
In. Religious Orientation Scale -----Prosociality	.59	.24	.10	1.0	2.4	.01
Prosociality -----Flourishing Scale	.30	.07	.16	.44	4.2	.001
Direct Effect	.18	.25	-.30	.68	.75	.45
Total Effect	.36	.25	-.13	.87	1.4	.15

Note. In. ROS = Intrinsic Religious Orientation Scale; Prosociality = Pro-Sociality Scale; FS = Flourishing Scale; SE = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL = Upper Limit.

This Table indicates that direct and total effects are not significant but indirect effect is significant which shows that prosocial behaviors significantly mediate the relationship between INRO and Psychological Flourishing. Additionally, it was postulated that female are likely to score higher on psychological flourishing in university students. An Independent sample *t*-test was used to check mean differences results are shown in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. *Mean Differences on Psychological Flourishing in University Students (N = 200)*

Variable	Male (n = 100)		Female (n = 100)		t(98)	P	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			LL	UL	
FS	41.6	10.2	43.3	10.3	97.9	.77	-5.77	2.37	0.16

This table shows that there are no significant gender differences on psychological flourishing in university students.

Discussion

The study aimed to investigate the relationships among RO (INRO, EXPRO, and EXSRO), pro-social behaviors, and psychological flourishing in university students. It was hypothesized that there is likely to be a significant positive relationship between RO (INRO, EXPRO, and EXSRO), pro-social behaviors with psychological flourishing in university students. The results revealed a significant positive relationship of EXPRO and pro-social behaviors with psychological flourishing in university students. Likewise, [Jaffery and colleagues \(2021\)](#) found significant positive relationships between religiosity and flourishing. In another research, it was reported that people with high EXRO experience more psychological flourishing ([Abdollahi et al., 2018](#)). It could be argued that interpersonal interaction, networking, and community involvement are directly related to EXPRO. Increased social capital, emotional support, and a decrease in loneliness are all closely associated with psychological wellbeing ([VanderWeele, 2017](#)). Because social harmony and group membership are essential to wellbeing in collectivistic societies like Pakistan. In collectivistic settings, outward religious participation (EXPRO) may be more socially reinforced and rewarded than purely internal belief. Engaging in visible religious practices can enhance social approval, identity, and connectedness—all of which are core components of flourishing. Intrinsic religiosity, being internal and less visible, may not yield the same immediate social or psychological rewards unless expressed through action (pro-social behavior).

Moreover, it was postulated that RO and prosocial behaviors are likely to predict psychological flourishing in university students. The results revealed that EXPRO and prosocial behaviors are significant positive predictors of psychological flourishing in university students. The researchers reported that prosocial behaviors positively predict psychological flourishing ([Nelson et al., 2016](#)). The findings indicated that intrinsic religious orientation did not significantly predict psychological flourishing. It could be due to the reason that university students' innate religiosity is still evolving and not completely incorporated into their identities. According to research, beliefs are frequently questioned or unstable throughout emerging adulthood, which reduces their direct impact on wellbeing. On the other hand, extrinsic religiosity—such as going to religious events for social purposes—offers instant advantages including peer support, social belonging, and regular routines that directly improve flourishing ([King & Boyatzis, 2015](#)).

Furthermore, it was assumed that prosocial behaviors are likely to mediate the relationship between INRO and psychological flourishing in university students. The results indicated that prosocial behaviors significantly mediated the relationship between INRO and psychological flourishing. Likewise, researchers suggested that prosocial behaviors mediate the relationship between RO and psychological flourishing (Jaffery et al., 2021). Because INRO's impact functions through behavioral pathways rather than immediate psychological results, it may not exhibit a large direct effect (Hardy & Carlo, 2011).

Additionally, it was hypothesized that females are likely to score more on psychological flourishing than males in university students. The results revealed non-significant gender differences on psychological flourishing in university students. Abdollahi and colleagues (2018) reported non-significant gender differences on psychological flourishing in university students. Joshanloo and Jovanović (2020) found that when social and psychological resources are taken into consideration, gender differences in subjective well-being and related dimensions are frequently negligible or statistically insignificant. Male and female students are exposed to comparable academic demands, stressors, and social interaction possibilities in modern university environments, which may lessen historical gender disparities in favorable psychological outcomes.

Implications

Extrinsic personal religious orientation (EXPRO) and psychological flourishing are positively correlated; indicating that even EXPRO types of religion can improve university students' wellbeing.

Second, pro-social behavior's strong predictive effect emphasizes how crucial it is to students' wellbeing. It suggests that actions like sharing, empathy, and helping are not only socially acceptable but also psychologically advantageous, supporting positive psychology viewpoints that associate increased life satisfaction with altruism.

Most importantly, pro-social behavior's function as a mediator between psychological flourishing and intrinsic religious orientation (INRO) sheds light on the underlying mechanism of this link. It implies that people who are inherently religious may flourish more because their internalized beliefs promote pro-social behavior, which in turn promotes a feeling of purpose, community, and personal development.

Additionally, recognizing the significance of religious orientation and promoting flexible forms of faith that foster social connection may be beneficial for counseling and student development programs. Programs that promote pro-social engagement, like community service, peer mentorship, and volunteering, can be created by educational institutions and mental health specialists as means to improve students' wellbeing.

Limitation and Suggestions

The findings' generalizability is impacted by the sample's restriction to college and university students. Students are comparatively homogeneous group that is frequently impacted by similar social and educational contexts. As a result, the findings might not apply to other groups, like people from non-academic environments or elderly persons.

Second, response biases, especially social desirability bias, may be introduced by the use of self-report measures. Participants may have over reported positive behaviors or attitudes, which could have inflated the observed associations, because constructs like religion and pro-social behaviors are socially valued.

Furthermore, greater applicability may be constrained by cultural environment. Religious practices and their social connotations may vary among cultures if the sample was taken from a particular area (such as Lahore, Pakistan), which could affect the relationship between religiosity and pro-social behaviors.

In order to overcome these constraints, future studies should use experimental or longitudinal designs, use multi-method assessments (such as behavioral observations), and include more representative and diverse groups.

Conclusion

In the light of above discussion, we can say that EXPRO, and pro-social behaviors are significantly associated with psychological flourishing in university students. Overall, the study identifies pro-social behaviors as a crucial mechanism by which religion leads to psychological flourishing, providing a significant target for treatments meant to enhance the mental health and general wellbeing of students.

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