Students' Identity and Mental Well-Being Among Muslims and Christians in Pakistan

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The identity, belongingness to the larger society as well as mental well-being of minorities in Pakistan may have suffered as a result of recent social and political attacks on Christians. The present study was aimed at finding and comparing various aspects of identity (i.e., personal, social, relational, and collective) and mental well-being among adolescents from the majority (Muslims) and minority (Christian) religious groups of Lahore district in Pakistan. The study hypothesized that adolescents of religious minorities would have a lower level of sense of aspects of identity than their dominant counterparts. The sample comprised of 414 male and female students (Muslim = 225, Christian =189) with an age range from 13 to 18years, drawn from two Muslim and two Christian schools. Data was collected using the Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (Cheek & Briggs, 2013), and Warwick–Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (Tennant et al., 2007). Results indicated a significant difference in the level of awareness of aspects of identity as well as well-being between majority and minority adolescents. Furthermore, within the majority group, there was also a significant gender difference in social identity and mental well-being with Muslim boys scoring higher than Muslim girls on these variables. Implications of the study are discussed.

Keywords. Identity, adolescents, christians, muslims, well- being

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Cultural practices and societal norms and beliefs contribute a significant role in the way the individuals grow and develop their individual personality traits and attitudes (Hsu, 1983). An individual develops a social-cognitive personal self, typically at the stage of adolescence, which enables the individual to make reasoned decisions and to recognize their potential for future actions (Beronsky, 1989; Erikson, 1968; Eikson, 1982).

Adolescence is a critical stage in the establishment of a personal identity, as an individual attempts to come to terms with their place in the world around them. As Erikson (1980) has pointed out, the social-cultural setting has a crucial impact on the nature of a person's perception of the world around them and how they react to it. Once established, an exclusive formation of identity stimulates a sense of psychological well-being (Erikson, 1968). Young adolescents seek out greater freedom and independence compared to children and tend to become more capable at stressing their own autonomy (Graber, Archibald, & Brooks-Gun, 1999). An exclusive formation of identity stimulates a sense of psychological well-being (Hassan, Vignolesa, & Schwartz, 2017; Erikson, 1968). Empirical research study also shows that identity attainment status reveals the essence of adolescent mental health and social adjustment, and is a predictor of positive social and psychological outcomes and warm relationship satisfaction in adulthood (Beyers & Seiffge-Krenke, 2010; Waterman, 2007). While individuals who reveal identity diffusion have been reportedly high on self-related issues (Sandhu & Tung, 2004). Identity moratorium individuals are in a state of insecurity concerning life choices; this status in particular is related with apprehensive feelings before reaching identity achievement (Kroger, Martinussen, & Marcia, 2010).

Theoretical Background

Social identity theory (Abrams, 2010; Tajfel, 1974; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), postulates how individuals create their own personal and social identities which differentiate them from other individuals, or from other social groups (Oaks, Turner, & Haslam 1991). According to this theory, individuals form and express their social identities based on important cultural and historical contexts, and such founded identities hold valuable implications for not just individual development (Phinney, 1992), but also for social relations and interactions (Tajfel, 1974), as well as for relationships and connectivity on a national level (Reeskens & Wright, 2013).

While some researchers have implied that social identity theory is best applied to ethnic and religious identity (Deaux et al., 1995), further exploration of ethnic identity, specifically in minorities, continue to suggest that religious, political, gender, SES, occupational, and other forms of identification are not as significant as ethnic identity (Nandi & Platt, 2012). In other words, ethnic identity is seen as the solitary, most relevant aspect of identity.

In contrast to previous research with ethnic minorities, more recent research is just now beginning to explore the significance of ethnic identity for even the ethnic majority (Kenny, 2014; Henderson et al., 2017). Consequently, while existing studies have considered the development of ethnic and political identities together, other areas of identity and how they relate to ethnic identity remain to be explored. Keeping in mind that individual and social identity both have implications regarding social categorization such as inclusion and exclusion (Tajfel & Turner, 1986), it is relevant to explore the relationship between ethnic identity (which may be accompanied by schisms) and political identity (which has implications on a public, national level).

Sedikides and Brewer (2001) established three distinctive components of identity: personal, relational, and collective; personal identity comprises areas that state one's aims values, beliefs, and life philosophy. Personal identity strives for continuity, harmony, coherence and consistency in a person's behavior (Ahmad & Evergeti, 2010). Relational identity comprehends domains that highlight one's role in relation to other people. Collective identity extends to spheres indexing identification with different social groups such as religious and ethnic social circles. Tajfel and Turner (1979) differentiated social identity from personal identity. The former refers to the identity derived from one's membership in various social groups. Recently, Cheek and Briggs (2013) formulated a four-dimensional model of identity consisting of personal, relational, social and collective identity. Personal identity comprises one's own values, standards, feelings, ideas, future goals, etc. Relational identity especially refers to one's belongingness to close relationships and significant others. Social identity, regarded as public identity orientation in later versions (see Cheek & Cheek, 2018), pertains to one's perceptions of social image in the eyes of other people, one's popularity and reputation. Collective identity especially refers to a sense of belongingness to a community, one's religion, ethnic background and citizenship in a country. Research supports the impact of people's social identities on their personal insights, sentiments, and conduct. There are situations in which people's collective selves and social identities may guide

their perceptual, emotional, and behavioural responses in significant ways (Ellemers, Spears, & Doosje, 2002).

Pakistan has been seen as distinctive in terms of identity styles due to its contextual differences that operate in unique ways to construct identity (Hassan, Vignoles, & Schwartz, 2017). Pakistan is an equally an Islamic and a patriarchal society that is dominant with traditional cultural values (Hassan, 2016). Pakistan came into being based on nationalistic religious ideology (Mardsen, 2005). Grounded with this theological support, other multifaceted influences as state, caste, nationalism, faith, and etymological affairs also played a robust role in identity development of Pakistanis (Hassan, 2016; Jalal, 1995). Pakistan is thus a huge, pluralistic country in nature compounded with diverse religious, ethno-linguistic and sectarian groups. With 2.61% of the total world population, Pakistan is a prominent South Asian country that is 97% Muslim. The broad religious ratios are Sunni 77%, Shia 20% and the minority groups of Christianity, Hinduism, Parsis, and others 3% (Pakistan Survey Economics, 2015-2016). The Muslim community makes an overwhelming majority with more than 90 percent of its 142 million population as compared to 10-13 million Pakistanis belonging to the marginal populations of Christians, Hindus and Sikhs. The country is a multicultural society, but the Non-Muslims tend to occupy less dominant positions in all walks of life (Iqbal, Ahmad, & Ayub, 2012; Malik, 2002).

The Christians are the most prominent of these marginal groups (Malik, 2002). In recent years, Christians in Pakistan have suffered in particular from violent Islamist attacks. They are seen by militants as allies and mediators of the Christian West in the country (Rais, 2007). For this reason, they usually face discrimination in many domains of life such as norms, values, traditions, religious beliefs and practices. Suicide attacks on Christian schools and during festivals are developing a sense of insecurity that is affecting identity formation of adolescents of minority groups (Hussain, Salim, & Naveed, 2011). There are frequently documented cases of discrimination and coercion directed at Christians both at the official and social levels. For instance, during the last few years, disputes arose due to the country's debatable Blasphemy Law approved by Sharif cabinet that caused religious tensions due to higher reservations about the admittance to justice for the religious subgroups. This is typified by the trial of the Christian Aasia Bibi for blasphemy allegedly committed in 2009 (Bhatti, 2018). Bibi was convicted by a lower court, despite international protests. Within Pakistan, in 2011 the former Governor of the Punjab speaking on Bibi's behalf was murdered by his security guard, who in turn was executed after a trial. Bibi was imprisoned

under the sentence of death until the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered her release in 2018 and quashed the conviction. Despite no longer having charges against her, Aasia was under threat from the militants. The Government of Pakistan, hence, sent her abroad within days of her acquittal.

The muting of minority voices on such issues can be attributed to the fact that Christian identity is neglected when they are given only a few minority seats for which tickets are allotted by mainstream political parties. Their participation in legal and policy matters is thus restricted. Minority candidatures demonstrate their annoyance about the problem of segregation from mainstream politics. Due to this unfair policy, they do not get rights to place their own candidates in election (Khan, 2017). Due to the political and economic factors that cause racism, Christians are more likely to face antagonism in society (Malik, 2002). This antagonism arises from prejudice based on religious bigotry towards the Christian belief system (Khan, 2017). The upsurge of Islamic, radical militancy in Pakistan has significantly contributed to the spread of religious intimidation, and Christians in particular have been recent targets for terrorism (Al-Mushir, 2014; Rais, 2007). Pakistan is assumed as the third least tolerant country in terms of accepting religious diversity (Gelfand et al., 2013). This rising Islamic radicalization has influenced the Christian identity that is directly or indirectly embedded from our cultural and social environment (Al-Mushir, 2014).

Owing to this discrimination and socio-cultural marginalization, being a neglected minority group leads towards identity crisis (Iqbal, Ahmad, & Ayub, 2012). As discussed above, adolescents with their budding personalities may especially feel dissonance in marginalizing environments. So, the central argument of this study is that political strands, state formation procedures, denominational inclinations and Islamic militancy have instigated intolerance and the resultant the marginalization of religious minority sects, which provides a big hurdle in the identity formation of the minority youth group.

This study investigates the identity formation of Muslim and Christian adolescents in order to know how belongingness to majority and minority may influence various dimensions of identity. It also investigates the levels of mental well- being in both groups insofar as identity formation has been established to be linked with mental well-being. The study investigates these differences with reference to gender in particular, as research evidence suggests that during adolescence, boys and girls explore the world in highly personalized ways and gender disparities in opportunity and expectations become mainly evident (Brady, 2005). Also, the social context and culture can

produce differential experiences for males and females (Mensch, Bruce, & Greene, 1998). In most traditional societies, these gender disparities are magnified. Furthermore, girls are less happy in attaining their identity goal (Matteson, 1993). Gender is hence an important dimension while exploring identity formation especially in chauvinistic societies, where socio-cultural norms and the traditional roles expected from women.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study

1. To investigate and compare the levels of awareness of social identity in adolescents of religious majority and minority groups

2. To find out the status of mental well-being in adolescents of religious majority and minority groups.

3. To find out gender differences within religious majority and minority groups on social identity and mental well-being.

Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were proposed in this study.

1. Adolescents belonging to the religious majority will have significantly higher levels of awareness of identity than adolescents belonging to religious minorities.

2. Adolescents belonging to the religious majority will have significantly higher levels of mental well-being than adolescents belonging to the religious minority.

3. Within religious majority and minority groups, men will have a significantly higher level of awareness of identity than women.

4. Within religious majority and minority groups, men will have a significantly higher level of mental well-being than women.

Method

Participants

A convenient sample of 414 students was taken from four schools, two Muslim and two Christian, located in the Lahore region that is a metropolitan city of the Pakistan. Among the participants (n = 414), 54.3% were male (n = 225); and 45.7% were female students (n =189). The ages of the participants ranged from 13 to 18 years. The research was conducted after getting approval of the

researchers' affiliated institution and the concerned authorities of the schools on consent forms. The questionnaire details and demographic information sheet were shared with the authorities. Data were gathered from students during their class time after getting permission from the class teacher. The principal researcher collected data through self-administration and explained the instructions to fill in the measures. Students were informed that the purpose of the questionnaire was to gain a better understanding of the students' identity and well- being. Participants were informed that their involvement in the survey is voluntary and their responses will remain confidential and will not be shared with any other external agency. They were requested to report any distress and informed about the right to withdraw the study at any time. After the data collection, students were debriefed and assured about access to published materials. Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 1

Demographic Profile of the Sample (N = 325)

Variables	*f*	%
Gender		
Male	225	54.3
Female	189	45.7
Age		
13-15 years	308	74.4
16-18 years	106	25.6
Religion		
Muslims	229	55.3
Christian	185	44.7

Measures

Demographic Form. A customized demographic form was aimed to obtain basic information about the personal characteristics of the participants (gender, age, religion).

Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV*).* It was developed by Cheek and Briggs (2013) was used to assess various dimensions of identity. It is a 45 itemed questionnaire that determines aspects of identity such as 'Personal Identity Orientation' (10 items, α= .63), 'Relational Identity Orientation' (10 items, α=.70), 'Social Identity Orientation' (7 items, α=.64), and 'Collective Identity Orientation' (8 items, α=.60). AIQ-IV has a 5-point Likert type scale response format

with five possible responses that range from 1 (Not important to my sense of who I am) to 5 (Extremely important to my sense of who I am). Possible range of scores on Aspects of Identity Questionnaire (AIQ-IV) was 44-250; where, high scores on this scale specify high level of aspects of identity which illustrates that individuals would be inclined toward identity aspects in a positive manner, while low scores show lower level of identity determinants. The Cronbach alpha coefficient obtained for the current sample .87 for the overall scale (34 items) that indicates the suitability of the scale in the context of Pakistan.

Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS). It was developed by Tennant et al. (2007). It consists of 14 items based on Likert type scale ranges from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (All of the time). Conceivable score range on Mental well-being Scale was 14-70 with high scores revealing higher level of mental well-being which represents that the adolescents' positive mental well-being and low scores indicate lower level of adolescents' mental well-being. The Cronbach alpha reliability of the mental well-being scale was reported .77 for this study that is appropriate for this study.

Table 2

Mean and Standard Deviation of the Scales (N=325)

Scale variables	k	M	SD	r
Personal identity (10 items)		37.66	5.59	.63
Relational identity (10 items)		38.05	6.07	.70
Social identity (7 items)		24.58	5.48	.64
Collective identity (8 items)		31.57	4.93	.60
Aspects of identity (34 items)		131.85	17.18	.87
Mental well-being (14 items)		34.49	8.50	.77

Results

To determine the significant mean differences between minority and majority groups and gender differences between male and female on the scale of identity independent sample *t*-test was used. The results indicated that Muslim adolescents carried significantly higher scores on all aspects of identity than Christian adolescents. Also, Muslim sample scored significantly higher on mental well -being than Christians (see Table 3)

Table 3

Mean and SD and t-values for Identity Measures for Muslim and Christian Groups (N=414)

Variables	Muslims (n=229)		Christians (n=185)		t	95% CI		Cohen's d
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*		*LL*	*UL*	
Personal Identity	38.24	5.25	36.44	5.34	3.43**	0.76	2.83	0.33
Relational Identity	34.78	5.10	32.67	5.67	3.98**	1.07	3.15	0.39
Social Identity	25.93	4.57	24.60	4.81	2.88**	0.42	2.24	0.28
Collective Identity	32.46	4.07	30.37	4.45	4.97**	1.26	2.91	0.49
Overall identity	171.100	18.83	160.33	21.10	5.48**	6.90	14.62	0.54
Mental Wellbeing	36.13	8.10	33.02	8.95	3.71**	1.46	4.76	0.36

**$p < 0.01$.

Table 3 shows that there is a statistically significant mean score difference between majority and minority groups in terms of identity formation. On the overall identity scale, Muslim adolescents had higher identity formation ($M = 171.100$, $SD = 18.83$) as compared with Christians ($M = 160.33$, $SD = 21.10$); $t(414) = 5.48$, $p < 0.00$. Likewise, on the personal subscale, Muslims held higher scores ($M = 38.24$, $SD = 5.25$) than Christians ($M = 36.44$, $SD = 5.34$); $t (414) = 3.43$, $p < 0.01$; on the relational subscale Muslim showed greater score ($M = 34.78$, $SD = 5.10$) than to Christian ($M = 32.67$, $SD = 5.67$); $t (414) = 3.98$, $p < 0.01$ on the social identity subscale, Muslim had more scores ($M = 25.93$, $SD = 4.57$) as compared with Christians ($M = 24.60$, $SD = 4.81$); $t(414) = 2.88$, $p < 0.004$; on the collective identity subscale, Muslim revealed significant scores ($M = 32.46$, $SD = 4.07$) as compared to their Christian counterparts ($M = 30.37$, $SD = 4.45$); $t (414) = 4.97$, $p < 0.000$. On the variable of mental wellbeing scale, Muslims scored significantly higher ($M = 36.13$, $SD = 8.10$) than Christian students ($M = 33.02$, $SD = 8.95$); $t(414) = 3.71$, $p <.001$.

Results also indicated that there is a statistically significant mean score difference between male and female students of Muslim group, male students held significantly more mean scores ($M = 37.51$; $SD = 7.95$) on mental well-being as compared with female ($M = 33.93$; $SD = 8.58$); $t(289) = 3.31$, $p<.002$. However, there were

no significant differences between male and female students' identity and wellbeing in Christian, minority groups (see Table 3). The overall results thus suggest that Christian minority adolescents carry significantly lower scores on identity and mental well- being than the Muslim majority. Furthermore, girls belonging to Muslim majority had significantly lower levels of mental well- being as compared to Muslim boys.

Discussion

The current study examined the aspects of identity among religious minority and majority students as well as their mental well - being. Students' identity was measured against the four aspects of identity such as personal, social, relational and collective. The results showed a significant difference in the identity of Muslim and Christians. Muslim adolescents held significantly higher awareness of all aspects of identity formation in terms of personal, social, relational and collective than Christian's students. A reasonable clarification for such a finding could be that Christians are considered as second-class citizens of the country and they face discrimination in all walks of life in Pakistan (Khan, 2017). For being a minority group, they encounter more socio-cultural challenges that lead towards their identity crisis (Iqbal, Ahmad, & Ayub, 2012; Malik, 2000).

Pakistan is a collectivist country (Shah & Amjad, 2011) with religious and ethno-linguistic and sectarian diverse groups. In collectivist societies such as Pakistan, the social relationship of the individuals to the in-group inclines to be stable and persistent, emphasizes trust and loyalty to the group and receives the same treatment in return. Individuals from collectivist culture look after one another' needs and rely on emotional dependence on groups and have beliefs that group judgements have significance rather than individual decisions. Likewise, an understanding of individual identity is considered as one's place within the group, and taking care about others' needs and interests (Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, & Lucca, 1988). The overall higher identity awareness as well as mental well-being may be attributed to a majority status.

Regarding gender differences, this study showed that Muslim male adolescents held more awareness of overall identity than their female counterparts. Bussey (2011) defined gender as a collective category that reinforces social influences that are constructed on biological differences between the genders to gender differences. While, collectivistic cultures promote obedience and loyalty to social

institutions, patriarchy in collectivist cultures produces hierarchical roles and unequal positions putting women in subordinate roles, In Pakistan, females have little or no empowerment in their life course and weak representation in terms of deciding their future. Men are considered more empowered and have autonomy to take decisions in all affairs of life that strengthens their social identity and gives them confidence to retain male chauvinism. Male dominant versions of religion are encouraged as can be observed from All Parties Conference raising voices against Domestic Violence Bill in assembly on religious grounds. Pervasiveness of this social context does not encourage Muslim women to reveal their opinion in different life matters that is affecting woman's identity and limiting their social rights. Although Pakistan shows an enormous number of women in assemblies, so far, this increase has not guaranteed Muslim women's rights, liberty, and protection which obviously affect their mental well-being.

Limitations and Suggestions

The consistency and validity of the results of this investigation might be tested over time by repeating the study on, say, a two-yearly basis to monitor changes in response to wider social pressures. Although adolescents belonging to 13 to 18 years were targeted in this study, follow-up studies might be more age-specific. To generalize the findings to minority adolescents of other religious groups, there is a need to include other minorities such as Parsi, Ahmadi, and Sikh in the sample for the extended studies. As only Lahore district was considered for data collection in this study, future work should involve other districts and provinces to determine a broader picture of minority social identity and mental health issues. Moreover, the socioeconomic status of the participants can also be tested for further in-depth analysis. The present study was only based on empirical data, which lends itself to a monitoring program at minimal expense, but at some time it would be necessary for mixed methods research to have an input, where qualitative interview data would give some validation of the questionnaire responses.

Implications

The findings of present research will be valuable to the academicians, parents, policy makers, social workers, psychologists and counsellors to reassure the development of active guidelines and strategies to cope up with intolerance and discrimination against children of the minority Christian group in the areas of education,

training and employment. The present research can lead to further understanding of the identity issues related to personal, relational, social and collective identity between minority and majority groups, and can lead to the design effective counselling strategies to cope with these aspects of identity. By using the concepts of equality, tolerance and inclusive education, all stakeholders (teachers, students, parents, and administrators) can be provided with suitable strategies that give confidence to students and help in their identity formation and develop better bonds with society around them. This study provides implications for future study to consider the variables of interfaith sects variables to present the geo-political differences to examine the phenomena of the research. Likewise this study suggests to consider the equal proportionate sample from minority and majority groups to examine the identity development aspects and also considering the interview protocols to investigate the views of the respondents on the same phenomena.

Powerful measures need to be taken to confirm the Christian involvement in all walks of life, particularly economically and publicly. Politically, they should be given reasonable participation in the decision-making bodies, such as allocation of seats for minority groups in government and assembly and consultative bodies on state level regarding addressing minority matters. Regardless of discrimination of colour, caste, creed and gender, government should provide equal opportunities to its citizen and respect their interfaith beliefs. Worship places (mosque and church) must be secured in terms of safety and security, and sectarianism should be discouraged to teach that is ruining interfaith harmony, brotherhood and tolerance in society. Furthermore, the school curriculum must include lessons addressing respecting others, tolerance and interfaith harmony (see Riaz & Khan, 2015).

Conclusion

Overall, this study recognized that Christian students held a low sense of social identity and well-being as compared to Muslims adolescents. The findings of this study are quite significant regarding diverse aspects of identity in the minority youth, it can be concluded that the exposure to extremist environment and prejudiced attitudes may have contributed to the low sense of social identity of Christians. Due to religious extremism in Pakistani society, a cognitive dissonance is prevailing among religious groups in Pakistan. This may be further probed as a reason behind the pessimistic thinking patterns of minority groups like Christians regarding their identity

development as compared to the dominant Muslim groups. In addition to this, it is realistic to conclude that Pakistan is one of the participant countries where marginalization of minorities is defilement at national and international legislations, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The conclusion recognized from the findings of this research may also contribute in the development of pragmatic grounds for investigating determinants and aspects of identity in relation to background information of the adolescents.

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