Are Character Strengths Universal?
Evidence From Pakistani Context

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Character strengths as positive attributes have been valued universally and theorized to improve the functioning of individuals and society. Considering their importance in positive psychology and the assertion of the VIA framework about the ubiquity of character strengths, the present study aimed to investigate the universality of character strengths in Pakistan. Moreover, the role of gender and age in possession of character strengths was examined. For this purpose, a sample of 497 participants (M_{age} = 27.41 years, SD_{age} = 8.41) from Pakistani adults was taken. Participants provided information regarding the possession of character strengths. Results showed that character strengths were prevalent in Pakistani participants as indicated by the mean scores of all character strengths. Honesty, kindness, fairness, spirituality, and gratitude emerged as the top-ranked character strengths. Rank profile of current data strongly converged with the rank profile of the pre-existing Pakistani sample and moderately converged with the rank profile of the pre-existing US sample (McGrath, 2015). Moreover, the results showed that men scored significantly higher than women on creativity and curiosity whereas women scored significantly higher than men on honesty, gratitude, and spirituality. Lastly, the possession of five character strengths (i.e., creativity, perspective, bravery, perseverance, and gratitude) significantly differed among participants of different age groups. All the findings supported the notion of the VIA framework about the universality of character strengths across cultures as well as the specificity of ranking in a particular culture.

Keywords. Character strengths, prevalence, VIA classification, ubiquity, Pakistani context

With the dawn of the 21st century, the emergence of positive psychology broached the Values in Action (VIA) Classification (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The VIA classification is a hierarchical

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framework that took its roots from the major religions of the world and philosophical writings (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005) to formulate the top level of the conceptual hierarchy i.e., Virtues. Virtues are defined as the essential features that are valued by religions and moral philosophers in their writings, emerged constantly throughout human history, and are evidence of good character (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The intermediate conceptual level of the psychological process consists of character strengths that define the virtues or the distinctive routes to represent a specific cluster of virtues. For instance, among the 24 character strengths, certain character strengths clustered together based upon their similar contribution to the community but are distinct from one another. The lower conceptual level is situational themes which are situation-specific for the manifestation of any character strength. These themes are highly specific in terms of the context, such as home or workplace. Peterson and Seligman (2004) proclaimed that character strengths balance moral virtues (abstract) and situational themes (concrete). The importance and comprehensiveness of this framework lead us towards the consideration of the VIA framework, particularly character strengths in the cultural context of Pakistan.

Peterson and Seligman (2004) grouped 24 character strengths under six clusters. First, strengths of wisdom and knowledge contain those character strengths that foster the acquisition of knowledge such as curiosity, creativity, love of learning, judgment, and perspective. Second, emotional strengths contain the character strengths related to the power and will to accomplish even having opposition such as honesty, bravery, zest, and perseverance. Third, interpersonal strengths are related to attending to and befriending others such as love, social intelligence, and kindness. Fourth, civic strengths are related to healthy community life. This cluster includes character strengths of fairness, teamwork, and leadership. Fifth, strengths of temperance foster frugality such as forgiveness, self-regulation, modesty, and prudence. Sixth, the theological strengths connect with the largest universe such as hope, gratitude, appreciation, humor, and spirituality. The importance of character strengths has been highlighted by Niemiec (2020) who theorized that character strengths matter in thriving of humans by performing opportunity and adversity functions. Opportunity functions included awareness of strengths for their use, mindfulness, and valuables for character strengths-relevant behaviors. While, adversity functions included, buffering the role of character strengths, reappraisal, and resilience. Character strengths play a dual role in the health and well-being of individuals, particularly mental health. By dual role, we mean that these not only

reduce the sufferings of individuals but also boost their well-being (Niemiec, 2023; Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Peterson and Seligman (2004) argued that the list of 24 character strengths is universal; however, the ranking of 24 character strengths may vary across cultures. Over the years, the universality claim has been supported directly or indirectly by several researchers across the globe (Heintz et al., 2019). The literature can be categorized under the following categories. For instance, literature exploring the prevalence and relevance of character strengths within a specific culture (Biswas-Diener, 2006; Shimai et al., 2006) or across cultures (McGrath, 2015; Park et al., 2006) to support universality. Further, some studies validated measures related to character strengths (Anjum & Amjad, 2020; Ruch et al., 2010) and some studies explored character strengths with other variables (Harzer & Ruch, 2013; Harzer et al., 2017). The last two categories of research indirectly supported universality by studying this phenomenon in different cultures.

The two cross-cultural studies (McGrath, 2015; Park et al., 2006) are of particular importance. Park et al. (2006) explored the universality of character strengths across 54 nations and supported the universality of character strengths even with the distinct ranks profiles of nations that converge with the rank profile of the US. However, this cross-cultural study lacks a representative Pakistani sample. Later, McGrath (2015) extended this cross-cultural study with a representative sample from 75 nations including Pakistan. He found that the ranking of character strengths in the Pakistani sample converged with the US rank profile, even though some differences were also found. Most recently, Weziak-Bialowolska et al. (2023) examined associations among character strengths and several health-related outcomes using data of respondents from 159 countries. The main focus of the study was not on the prevalence of character strengths. However, the mean scores on 24 character strengths were above average showing reasonably high possession of character strengths among the participants.

Further, demographics such as age and gender are also important in the development and expression of strengths. To date, several studies have explored character strengths in relation to demographics. A relatively recent meta-analysis (Heintz et al., 2019) has examined character strengths as per age, gender, and nationality of the participants. The findings indicated that 17 out of 24 character strengths differ by gender; however, most of the effect sizes were very small. Among those character strengths for which small to medium effect was found (i.e., kindness, love, gratitude, and appreciation), women scored higher than men. Moreover, the moderating effect of

age was also found for around half of the character strengths. The trend of gender differences was specifically found in the adolescent sample. Moreover, Pakistani studies also explored the role of gender and age in the VIA framework (Anjum & Amjad, 2020; Tariq & Zubair, 2015; Zubair et al., 2018) in validation and cross-sectional studies. The focus of cross-sectional studies was on virtues rather than character strengths (Tariq & Zubair, 2015; Zubair et al., 2018).

Rationale of the Present Study

According to the fundamental criteria of the VIA framework, character strengths are conceded to be ubiquitous and valued across cultures (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). The originators have fortified against cultural biases in their classification by employing source materials from diverse philosophical writings and religions to generate lists of candidate strengths (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). Nevertheless, some studies argue that positive psychology is not culturally sensitive. Likewise, character strengths are overly oversimplified and do not provide a better understanding of different cultures (Kubokawa & Ottaway, 2009). Christopher and Hickinbottom (2008) alleged that the 24 desirable character strengths may be present in different cultures, but their meanings are yet Western-oriented. Peterson and Seligman (2004) proclaimed that situational themes in the VIA classification act as buffers against the valid criticism that sociocultural variation may exist in how people conceive of goodness but not as much at the level of character strengths. Subsequently, a considerable amount of research on character strengths has been conducted in diverse cultures and is supportive of the ubiquity assertion made by Peterson and Seligman (2004) for instance, in the US (Park et al., 2006), the UK (Linley et al., 2007), Africa (Khumalo et al., 2008), Germany (Ruch et al., 2010), India (Choubisa & Singh, 2011), Spain (Azanedo et al., 2014), China (Redfern et al., 2015), and Pakistan (Anjum & Amjad, 2020). Moreover, cross-cultural research (McGrath, 2015) also supported the universality claim considering the argument that the ranking of character strengths may vary strongly across cultures (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). However, most of the research studies were conducted in European and American countries with a low representation of African, Middle-Eastern, and Asian nations. A comprehensive review paper also highlighted that research in the field of positive psychology in general the domain of character strengths in specific is intensive among European and North American populations and underrepresent the Asian population (Miglianico et al., 2019).

Likewise, research on character strengths in Pakistan is fledgling and scarce. To the best of the authors' knowledge, only a few published studies are available to date exploring correlates of character strengths among young adults (Anjum & Amjad, 2016, 2019, 2020) and university students (Tariq & Zubair, 2015; Zubair et al., 2018) in Pakistan. The focus of these studies was limited to either scale validation or correlates reporting non-conclusive findings. More recently, few studies have been published examining the application of the VIA classification of character strengths at work (Mubashar et al., 2022; Mubashar & Harzer, 2023). However, it is important to examine the cultural relevance and prevalence of character strengths before their application in a particular culture such as Pakistan. Steger and Kashdan (2008) also emphasized studying the multicultural and transcultural aspects of character strengths. Conceivably, it is hard to borrow strengths development programs and apply them blindly to culturally different samples. Therefore, the present research focused on the prevalence of character strengths to supplement the ongoing discussion on the ubiquity of character strengths with input from the collectivistic cultural and religious traditions of Pakistan. In this regard, two research questions have been formulated. 1) What are the most frequent (top five) and least frequent (bottom five) character strengths in the present Pakistani sample? 2) What are the differences and similarities in the most frequent and least frequent strengths of the present Pakistani sample with pre-existing data from Pakistan and the US (McGrath, 2015)?

Furthermore, existing literature established that character strengths are likely to vary in terms of gender and age (Heintz et al., 2019). This research aims to explore gender differences using two approaches. Firstly, ranks of all the 24 character strengths were computed for both men and women and their convergence has been assessed. Secondly, the mean differences were examined to see if the possession of character strengths varies across gender groups considering the following research questions. What are the most frequent and least frequent character strengths for men and women in Pakistani society? What are the gender differences in the possession of 24 character strengths? Thirdly, the mean differences were examined to see if the possession of character strengths varies across different age groups.

Method

Sample

The sample consisted of 497 adults from the general population of Pakistan (218 men and 279 women). The age range of the sample was from 18 to 58 years ($M_{age} = 27.41$ years, $SD_{age} = 8.41$). Only those

participants were considered who are at least 18 years old. Most of the participants reported that they completed their master's degree ($n = 267$) followed by intermediate and bachelor degree ($n = 170$) and doctoral degree ($n = 53$). Only seven participants reported having a matriculation degree. With respect to the sociodemographic aspect, the sample was diverse in terms of marital status, family background, and family system. Most of the participants were single ($n = 290$), or married ($n = 202$) with few exceptions ($n = 5$; divorced or widow). Most of the participants belong to the joint family system ($n = 314$; 63.2%) as Pakistani culture is collectivistic while the remaining belong to the nuclear family system ($n = 157$; 31.6%) or living alone away from their family ($n = 26$; 5.2%). Lastly, around three-quarters ($n = 336$; 67.6 %) of the participants belong to urban areas and the remaining 32.4% ($n = 161$) belong to rural areas of Pakistan. Lastly, as per monthly income, 25.4% ($n = 126$) belong to low socio-economic status, 36.4 % ($n = 181$) belong to middle socio-economic status, and 38.2 % $n = 190$) belong to high socio-economic status.

Instrument

The following measure is used to assess the major construct of the study.

Values in Action Inventory of Strengths

The Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS120; Littman-Ovadia, 2015; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) assesses 24 character strengths by 120 items. Each subscale consisted of five items. The ratings of participants on each item indicate the degree to which each item effectively describes them on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = *not like me at all* to 5 = *very much like me)*. The sample item is "I am always coming up with new ways to do things" (creativity). High scores on a particular subscale of character strength indicate a higher level of character strength possession. Internal consistencies of the VIA-IS120 reported by Littman-Ovadia (2015) ranged between $\alpha = .64$ to $\alpha = .90$ (median $\alpha = .78$). In current study, Cronbach alpha of the subscale ranged between $\alpha = .74$ (fairness) to $\alpha = .52$ (forgiveness and self-regulation).

Procedure

The sample was approached by the display of volunteer participation announcements in public places, on social media, and

through personal contacts. For data collection, both online and paper-pencil modes were used. The present research adhered to ethical and procedural guidelines for in-person and online modes of data collection. The prospective participants were informed about the purpose of the study along with the significance and requirements related to the research. Moreover, they were assured about the anonymity and confidentiality of the data. Those who agreed to partake were also informed about their right to withdraw. Overall, 515 participants filled in the data which were screened for suspicious response style and extreme cases. The final dataset consisted of 497 participants.

Results

Internal consistencies of the subscales of VIA-IS120 were explored before the main research questions (see method section). To examine the most frequent (top five) and least frequent (bottom five) character strengths in the present Pakistani sample, ranks and mean scores of 24 character strengths were explored. Moreover, to examine the differences and similarities in the most frequent and least frequent strengths of the present Pakistani sample with pre-existing data from Pakistan and the US (McGrath, 2015), the Spearman rank order correlation of the present data was computed with ranks of pre-existing international data (McGrath, 2015). Table 1 provides an overview of the means, ranks, and Spearman rank order correlation.

Table 1 shows that all of the 24 character strengths are prevalent in Pakistan as the mean scores were above the absolute midpoint (i.e., 2.5) of the subscales (range = 3.53 – 4.11). These mean scores also showed variability in scores. The ranking of the scores indicated that honesty, kindness, fairness, spirituality, and gratitude are the top-ranked character strengths while curiosity, bravery, perspective, love of learning, and self-regulation are the bottom-ranked character strengths. Among these top-possessed character strengths, fairness, kindness, and honesty converged with the top-possessed character strengths of pre-existing Pakistani and US data (McGrath, 2015).

Among the bottom possessed character strengths, only self-regulation converged with the bottom strength of two pre-existing samples (McGrath, 2015) to present the data in Table 1. Spearman rank order correlation is also reported and presented in table 1 and results indicated the convergence of ranks of the existing sample with pre-existing samples (McGrath, 2015). The strength of correlation of our sample was stronger with the pre-existing Pakistani sample than the US sample (McGrath, 2015).

Table 1

Means, Ranks, and Spearman Rank Order Correlations of Character Strengths with Pre-existing International Data

Scales	Pakistani Sample (N = 497)		Pakistan[1] (N = 476)		US[1] (N = 634933)	
	R	M	R	M	R	M
Creativity	19	3.68	13	3.82	14	3.77
Curiosity	20	3.67	11	3.84	5	3.99
Judgment	15	3.73	6	3.94	4	4.01
Love of learning	23	3.55	23	3.61	12	3.79
Perspective	22	3.63	12	3.83	9	3.84
Bravery	21	3.66	17	3.76	18	3.71
Perseverance	13	3.76	14	3.78	17	3.72
Honesty	1	4.11	3	3.99	1	4.03
Zest	12	3.76	19	3.72	20	3.64
Love	8	3.85	10	3.85	7	3.97
Kindness	2	4.02	2	4.01	3	4.01
Social Intelligence	10	3.80	16	3.77	10	3.83
Teamwork	7	3.92	5	3.94	13	3.78
Fairness	3	4.01	1	4.10	2	4.03
Leadership	6	3.92	8	3.91	11	3.81
Forgiveness	18	3.69	21	3.69	19	3.68
Modesty	17	3.70	22	3.64	23	3.47
Prudence	14	3.74	20	3.70	22	3.54
Self-regulation	24	3.53	24	3.45	24	3.36
Appreciation	11	3.79	15	3.78	15	3.76
Gratitude	5	3.97	7	3.92	6	3.99
Hope	9	3.84	9	3.85	16	3.73
Humor	16	3.71	18	3.76	8	3.90
Spirituality	4	3.98	4	3.94	21	3.58
r_s	-		.78***		.42*	
Actual Range of scales	1-5		1-5		1-5	

Note. [1]McGrath, 2015; Love = Capacity to love and be loved, Appreciation = Appreciation of beauty and excellence. M = Mean scores of 24 character strength. R = Ranks of 24 character strength. r_s = Spearman rank order correlations with ranks in the present Pakistani sample.
*$p < .05$. ***$p < .001$.

These findings presented in Table 1 are consistent with the international studies (i.e., Peterson et al., 2005; McGrath, 2015) which were conducted to establish the ubiquity and prevalence of character strengths using Spearman rank order correlation. In the following, a comparative overview of the 24 character strengths' possession across three data sets i.e., current study data, and pre-existing Pakistani and

US data (McGrath, 2015) is presented graphically highlighting their top and bottom-ranked strengths. Figure 1 provides a graphical view of the mean scores of all three samples.

Figure 1

Graph Showing Prevalence of Character Strengths in Present Sample and Pre-existing Samples from International Study (McGrath, 2015)
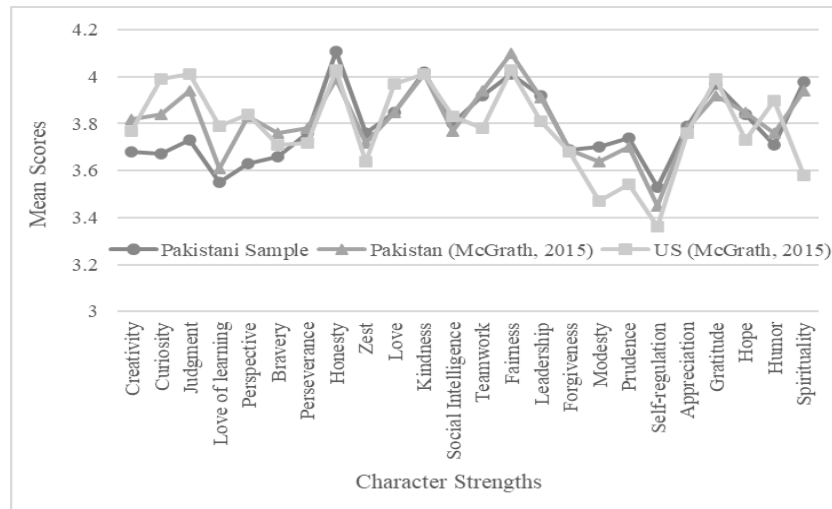
The Figure 1 shows mean scores on 24 character strengths of the current study data, pre-existing Pakistani and US data (McGrath, 2015). The graphical overview highlighted more similarities in the content and pattern of character strengths than the differences across the three data sets.

Furthermore, descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and ranks) and mean differences were computed to explore the gender differences in 24 character strengths. Table 2 provides an overview of gender-based descriptive statistics and mean differences along with the significance of mean differences in the form of a bar chart. The bar with solid black fill indicates the significant mean differences. All the mean differences were significant at .05 (except gratitude which was significant at .001).

Table 2 shows that all of the character strengths are possessed by both genders and mean scores indicated variability. More specifically, honesty, fairness, kindness, teamwork, and leadership are the top possessed character strengths while perspective, modesty, forgiveness, love of learning, and self-regulation are the bottom five character strengths reported by male participants. Further, honesty, gratitude, kindness, fairness, and spirituality are the top possessed character strengths.

Table 2

Descriptives and Independent Sample t-test Analysis of Gender for 24 Character Strengths

Scales	Men (n = 218)			Women (n = 279)			Mean Differences	
	M	*SD*	*R*	*M*	*SD*	*R*	Men Scored Higher	Women Scored Higher
Creativity	3.75	0.77	16	3.62	0.64	20		
Curiosity	3.75	0.70	15	3.60	0.66	21		
Judgment	3.77	0.70	13	3.70	0.69	16		
Love	3.57	0.76	23	3.53	0.71	23		
Perspective	3.69	0.72	20	3.59	0.66	22		
Bravery	3.70	0.66	19	3.64	0.66	19		
Perseverance	3.79	0.74	10	3.74	0.69	12		
Honesty	4.03	0.71	1	4.17	0.56	1		
Zest	3.83	0.69	9	3.72	0.68	13		
Love	3.83	0.71	8	3.86	0.74	9		
Kindness	3.96	0.70	3	4.05	0.64	3		
Social Int.	3.76	0.75	14	3.83	0.60	11		
Teamwork	3.92	0.67	4	3.91	0.62	7		
Fairness	3.98	0.71	2	4.04	0.61	4		
Leadership	3.91	0.68	5	3.92	0.63	6		
Forgiveness	3.66	0.70	22	3.68	0.68	18		
Modesty	3.67	0.71	21	3.71	0.61	14		
Prudence	3.79	0.72	12	3.71	0.68	15		
Self-regulation	3.54	0.76	24	3.52	0.66	24		
Appreciation	3.74	0.69	17	3.83	0.60	10		
Gratitude	3.86	0.70	7	4.06	0.62	2		
Hope	3.79	0.72	11	3.88	0.69	8		
Humor	3.73	0.73	18	3.70	0.69	17		
Spirituality	3.89	0.71	6	4.04	0.64	5		

Note. Love = Capacity to love and be loved; Appreciation = Appreciation of beauty and excellence; Social Int. = Social Intelligence. The bar with solid black fill indicated the significant mean differences. All the mean differences were significant at .05 (except gratitude which was significant at .01.

As honesty, gratitude, kindness, fairness, and spirituality are the top possessed character strengths while perspective, modesty,

forgiveness, love of learning, and self-regulation are the bottom five character strengths reported by male participants. Further, honesty, gratitude, kindness, fairness, and spirituality are the top possessed character strengths whereas creativity, curiosity, perspective, love of learning, and self-regulation are the bottom five character strengths reported by female participants. The ranking of 24 character strengths in both samples converged well with one another as indicated by top and bottom character strengths as well as supported by Spearman rank order correlation. Moreover, the mean differences indicate that half of the character strengths are higher among men and half among women. However, the t-test indicated that only five of these differences are significant. For instance, men scored significantly higher than women on creativity and curiosity while women scored significantly higher than men on honesty, gratitude, and spirituality.

Moreover, the role of age in character strengths was explored. For this purpose, data were split into three groups based on age. Group 1 consisted of participants with the age of 18 years to 28 years, the second group consisted of participants with age of 29 years to 40 years and the last group consisted of participants with age of 40 years and above. Analysis indicated that possession of character strengths differs among participants of different age groups. However, these differences were significant for five character strengths (i.e., creativity [F (2, 494) = 3.61, p = .03], perspective [F (2, 494) = 4.75, p = .01], bravery [F (2, 494) = 4.00, p = 0.02], perseverance [F (2, 494) = 3.25, p = .04], and gratitude [F (2, 494) = 3.94, p = .01]. More specifically, multiple comparisons indicated that out of these character strengths, perspective and bravery were higher among participants of 29-39 years old than among participants of 18-28 years old. While, possession of gratitude, was higher among younger participants (18-28 years old) as compared to older participants (29-39 years old).

Lastly, an additional analysis of independent sample ANOVA was performed to see the differences in character strengths with respect to the socio-economic status of the participants (See Table 4 in Appendix). Findings indicated that 19 character strengths significantly differ as per socio-economic status [F (2, 494) = 3.30-15.24, $p \leq 0.05$] (except for curiosity, bravery, perseverance, self-regulation, and modesty).

Discussion

This present paper explored the prevalence of character strengths by measuring the possession and distribution of character strengths among the general population of Pakistan. The greater interest was to examine the ranks of 24 character strengths specifically focusing on

the top and bottom character strengths in Pakistani culture as well as on the convergence of the rank profile of the present sample with the rank profiles of the pre-existing Pakistani and US samples (McGrath, 2015). The findings supported the ubiquity of character strengths as all 24 character strengths were possessed by our sample with few differences in the rank profile of Pakistani and US samples (McGrath, 2015). The findings were in line with the assertion of Peterson and Seligman (2004) regarding the possibility of distinct cultural ranking. The role of gender and age was also explored and most of the findings were consistent with the existing literature. The findings contributed to the indigenous and international literature by building a promising base for the application of the VIA classification in different domains and providing confirmation of the ubiquity of character strengths from a relatively less studied population.

Overall findings showed that all 24 character strengths are prevalent in Pakistan as indicated by the mean scores ($M \geq 3.55$). The top strengths of our sample were honesty, kindness, fairness, spirituality, and gratitude. Examples from real-life Pakistani culture are Dewar-e-Meharbani (the wall of kindness) and Edhi Foundation which are indicative of behavior related to character strength of kindness. The top strengths of our sample (honesty, kindness, fairness, and spirituality) were also among the top strengths of pre-existing Pakistani data (McGrath, 2015). Interestingly, the rank of kindness (i.e., 2nd) and spirituality (4th) were even identical in both samples. Moreover, three of the top possessed strengths (fairness, kindness, and honesty) also converged with the pre-existing US sample (McGrath, 2015). Among the bottom five strengths, two character strengths were in line with the pre-existing Pakistani sample and one with the US sample (McGrath, 2015), even in their ranking. For instance, love of learning secured the 23rd and 24th position respectively in both Pakistani samples whereas self-regulation secured the 24th position in all three samples. The Spearman rank order correlation strongly endorsed this trend as the rank profile of our data strongly correlated with the pre-existing Pakistani rank profile (McGrath, 2015) and moderately correlated with the pre-existing US rank profile (McGrath, 2015). The strength of association also supported the regional differences in character strengths (Choubisa & Singh, 2011; McGrath et al., 2015; Park et al., 2006). Moreover, a recent international study also found that honesty, kindness, fairness, and judgment were the top-ranked character strengths. Self-regulation, perseverance, and zest were the lowest-scoring character strengths (Weziak-Bialowolska et al., 2023). The findings were consistent with global literature. One of the explanations that our data supported the ubiquity of character

strengths might be that Pakistani culture is mainly based on Islamic writings which were recognized in the development of the VIA framework (Dahlsgaard et al., 2005). On the other hand, unique differences in our data can be explained in terms of the cultural influences as acknowledged by the originators of the VIA framework (Peterson & Seligman, 2004).

Furthermore, means and rank profiles of character strengths by gender also supported that all of the character strengths are possessed irrespective of gender, however, the ranking may differ as per the gender (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Specifically, three of the character strengths (honesty, fairness, and kindness) among the top five and three of the character strengths (love of learning, perspective, and self-regulation) among the bottom five converge among men and women as indicated by the strong association of rank profile. Moreover, Spearman rank order correlation indicated that the rank profile of both men and women also converged well with the rank profile of the overall sample. However, the strength of convergence was higher for men than for women. Furthermore, gender differences were explored using the mean differences which indicated that most of the mean differences were non-significant. Among the five significant, three character strengths (honesty, gratitude, and spirituality) were higher among women and two (creativity and curiosity) were higher among men. A recent meta-analysis (Heintz et al., 2019) supported this trend and found gender differences for 17 character strengths (small to medium), where women scored higher more often than men. Overall, the findings were meaningful and consistent with existing literature.

The age differences were found for the possession of five character strengths which is in line with the literature. For instance, ANOVA showed that participants 29-39 years old possess character strength of perseverance higher than the younger group, like present findings, it is most often positively associated strength with age. Moreover, the study yielded that participants (18-28) years possess character strength of gratitude more than the elder group. These findings cannot be explicitly supported with literature due to inconsistencies (e.g., Azanedo et al., 2014; Littman-Ovadia, 2015; Ruch et al., 2010). In a true sense, the pattern of completing tasks on time and achieving goals without thinking to quit if there are some obstacles is indicative of maturity which is absent at an early age. Moreover, when an adult enters adulthood he has a deep sense of thankfulness which over time fades away and may come back during the age of maturity. However, these findings call for a more

exhaustive measurement of socioeconomic status to corroborate its relations with character strengths.

Conclusion

The present research concludes that character strengths, as theorized ubiquitous in nature, are also valued in the Pakistani context. The results supported the universality of character strengths, corroborated the existing international literature regarding the prevalence and universality of character strengths, and extended it by providing evidence from a relatively less studied population of Pakistan. Overall, the findings advocated that character strengths are not a culture-specific phenomenon and thus settled the ground for further study of the VIA Classification in different settings (such as academic institutions and workplace) in Pakistan.

Limitations and Suggestions

This study is a noteworthy contribution due to the direct exploration of the prevalence and ubiquity of character strengths in Pakistani culture using a conventional approach. However, the findings should be interpreted cautiously owing to these limitations. First, most of the participants in our data belonged to Punjab Province. The underrepresentation from other provinces may limit the generalization of findings across Pakistan. In the future, a more representative sample can be taken considering this aspect. Second, most of the participants were educated with a small fraction of those who completed their matriculation. Therefore, in the future, even the uneducated population can be taken for extensive exploration.

Implications for Research and Practice

This study has made an important contribution to the VIA framework and has widespread utility in relatively less-studied Eastern cultures such as Pakistan. This study explored the universality of character strengths directly and unlocked a new horizon for Pakistani researchers to explore character strengths in different settings and with diverse variables. For instance, Character strengths showed associations with the pandemic of COVID-19 (as change over the course of the pandemic; Gander & Wagner, 2022) and with environmental actions and policies (Crookes et al., 2022). The impact of situational factors on character strengths also calls for its exploration and application in diverse situations.

The present study established the ubiquity of character strengths in Pakistan by measuring the possession of character strengths among the general population. However, future research can be planned to explore the distinctive nature of character strengths with personality traits. For this purpose, insight can be taken from Stahlmann and Ruch (2020) who examined the criteria of character strengths (i.e., morally valued). Furthermore, considering the malleable nature of character strengths to some extent (Peterson & Seligman, 2004), early development and training programs can nurture these positive traits.

Practically, the findings implicate the importance of character strengths at the individual and societal levels. The role of character strengths is more diverse as they allow the greater good of the collective to grow. Therefore, considering Mayerson's (2020) call for an urgent character strengths response, future research can be planned for collective gains. Literature guided that the combination of strengths being used, the degree of each strength used, and the situation in which it is used is important to reap the benefits from character strengths (Niemic, 2019). Considering their importance, character strengths-related workshops and seminars can be arranged by non-governmental organizations, media influencers, and social activists for the promotion of strength-relevant behaviors.

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