

The effect of religiosity on gratitude and aggression among male and female undergraduate students

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ABSTRACT

The research study sought to examine whether or not the level of religiosity impacted the level of gratitude and aggression amongst a sample of (N=100) undergraduate students. The research also aimed at comparing the gender differences for the same. The religiosity scale, gratitude questionnaire and aggression scale were used as tools for conducting the research. The analysis of the t-test results indicated that there was no significant difference between the three variables although there was a noticeable mean difference between the religiosity and aggression levels in the male and female undergraduates where the male undergraduates exhibited higher religiosity and lower aggression levels as compared to the female undergraduates, however, there was no considerable mean difference between the gratitude levels. The analysis of correlation matrices exhibited a positive relationship between the religiosity and gratitude levels of the undergraduates and posed no significant correlation between the religiosity and aggression levels. The linear regression analysis exhibited that religiosity predicted 10% of the variance in the gratitude levels of the college-going students; however, it did not predict the aggression levels for the same.

Keywords: *Religiosity, Gratitude, Aggression, Undergraduates*

From the past decades there has been a steady change in the pessimistic attitudes towards religion in the field of psychology to the identification of more optimistic associations between religion and the various aspects that underlie an individual's mental health. Religion has been an area of discussion in innumerable psychological studies since it has originated.

Religion acts as an influential institution which plays a significantly important role in shaping the social behaviour as well as the "basic personality structures" of people. Researches which demonstrate the role of religion in shaping the personality of an individual exhibit the important roles that religion plays in childhood, adolescence, adulthood and old age.

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The term religiosity refers to *the religious faith an individual has*. Score on the test of religiosity will therefore; indicate the degree to which an individual can be identified as religious. Since religion has many facets which vary in different societies, it has been very difficult to give a comprehensive definition of the term. Most of the major world religions, however, believe in fixed relationship between the human self and some non-human entity, the sacred, the Absolute God.

A popular and representative definition given by Galloway states that religiosity means, “faith in a power beyond himself where he seeks to satisfy emotional need and gain stability of life, and which he expresses in acts of worship and service.”

Being religious is different from having a religion i.e. if a person belongs to a religious group it does not necessarily mean that he or she is religious. Similarly, it is difficult to identify whether or not a person is religious if he or she is simply following a certain behaviour i.e. visiting a temple or religious place. Offering pooja, in a temple or any other religious place may be viewed as a religious act, but one may be religious even without doing so. Acts of worship in each religion are varied and no specific single act can determine an individual’s religiosity.

Dimensions of religiosity

Religiosity has three important aspects: theoretical, practical and emotional.

1. Theoretically, it alludes to an individual’s faith in God where God is often attributed as omnipotent, loving, benevolent and omniscient.
2. The practical aspect of constitutes of an individual’s faith in observance of ethical and moral duties and ritual as divine commands. They also include the religious customs, rituals and ceremonies which vary in each religion.
3. The emotional aspect is reflected in the feeling of devotion and dedication to God and experience of pleasure, delight and satisfaction in observance of religious practices.

Differences and similarities in different religions

The different religions differ in their theoretical and practical preaching. Buddhism and Jainism, for example, do not believe in the existence of any God. In spite of the different teachings of a religion there are certain behavioural dimensions of religiosity which are common in most of the religions such as worshipping God, inhibiting behaviours that are morally incorrect, observing sacrifice, tolerance, etc.

Types of Religiosity

There are two types of religiosity, which are mentioned below-

1. *Extrinsic religiosity* includes the social aspect of religiosity which refers to the time spent with people at religious places such as a church, mosque or a temple, sharing the same religious faith with people as well as attending the religious services. (Okulicz & Kozaryn, 2009) Extrinsic orientation of faith, is used to cultivate and maintain social relationships.(Allport & Ross, 1967) In the extrinsic faith of religiosity an individual believes in God, turns to them in need but the personal identity of an individual does significantly change with the religious beliefs which are altered to fit the person’s identity.
2. *Intrinsic religiosity* was first described by Gordon Allport and his contemporaries in the 1960s. It alludes to the importance people give to their religious customs &

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beliefs and try to consistently live with it. It provides them with a blueprint as to how they should be living their lives. In contrast to the extrinsic religiosity, people with intrinsic beliefs about religiosity are fully influenced by the religious preaching in their respective religions.

Prominence of Religiosity

The positive effects of religiosity, in both the social and educational realms, are attracting the attention of many researchers.

Recent researches have proven that certain dimensions of religiosity are associated with lower levels of depression (McCullough & Larson, 1999), subjective well-being, optimistic social attitudes and less probable chances of marital disillusionment (Swank et al. 2001). Thus Tsang & McCullough (2003) posed religiosity as a significant dimension in the field of positive psychology because some dimensions of religiosity positively correlated with mental well-being and positive interpersonal relationships.

Gratitude

Like various terms in the literature, gratitude also appears to have a variety of meanings, depending in the contexts of when it is used. For instance, it has been regarded as an ethical virtue, an attitude, an emotion, a stable personality characteristic feature, a habit, and also used as a coping response.

Gratitude has also been conceptualized as a stable personality trait at the state level as well as at the dispositional trait level. At the state level, gratitude has been regarded as a positive emotional reaction to any particular event or experience that could include receiving and accepting benefits or gifts from an external source. At the dispositional trait level it alludes to the general tendency of an individual to perceive and appreciate the positives in life. A positive outlook and a general grateful response to the life circumstances can lead to improved subjective well-being.

Definition

Gratitude maybe defined, “as the appreciation of what is valuable and meaningful to an individual and represents a general state of thankfulness and/or appreciation.” (Sansone & Sansone, 2010)

The above-mentioned definition transcends the interpersonal connotations ascribed to the term (i.e., the construct of receiving something from someone) and attributes the term with a more inclusive meaning (e.g., being thankful for experiences, such as being alive and coming into contact with nature). This definition also aligns itself with both state and trait level contexts.

Religiosity and Gratitude

Prior to the scientific researches, religious and philosophical traditions have conceptualized gratitude as an integral part of well-being, religiosity and spirituality.

Recent studies have indicated that religiosity can provide a motivating feature in human beings to be grateful (Emmons and Cumber, 2000; Harpman, 2004). Therefore, those who regularly attend religious services and rituals are more likely to have a greater sense of

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gratitude through the majority of their lives (Emmons and McCullough, 2003; Emmons 2005; Krause, 2006).

Gratitude is also a highly valued human disposition trait in the Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu thought. Cicero (Pro Plancio) held that “gratitude is not only the greatest of virtues, but the parent of all the others.” Buddha suggested that gratitude is a core aspect of a noble person. Christian devotional writers expounded on the intrinsic worth of gratitude and the sinfulness of ingratitude.

Prominence of Gratitude

Gratitude is negatively associated with the “negative triad” of beliefs that are associated with clinical depression. The triad involves "automatic, spontaneous and seemingly uncontrollable negative thoughts" about the self, environment and the future. Thus, by changing the affective perceptions of the daily life events with a more optimistic view, one can reduce the chances of being clinically depressed.

Gratitude is positively associated with hedonic and eudaimonic wellbeing which are subsequently associated with a reduced likelihood of depression. Undeniably, a plethora of researches have shown the positive correlations between elevated levels of positivity, mental well-being and overall life satisfaction with gratitude.

In terms of physical health, gratified people have better immunity, higher proclivity for healthy activities, are willing to seek medical help, adopt a healthy lifestyle and are physically healthier.

Lastly, gratitude also influences as to how people psychologically cope and approach the daily life hassles and stressors. Gratified people tend to actively deal and resolve the problems, as opposed to adopting characteristic features of avoidant behaviour.

Aggression

It is not possible to envision a society that is completely devoid of aggressive and violent behaviours. The discipline of history discloses that each civilization had its share of antisocial and deviant elements.

Researchers in the field of psychology have placed a significant importance to aggressive behaviour due to its permanence and vital associations with maladjusted behaviours in an individual's later life-span (Lerner & Thomas 1988), which have been regarded as challenging problems by their families, educators and the society.

Generally, aggression tends to decrease overtime as children learn to restrain aggressive behaviours and learn to express themselves verbally but for the children who do not eventually master these skills, aggressive behaviour aggravates and is further associated with a problems faced in the impending stages of life.

Aggression is a maladaptive behaviour associated with an emotionally disorganising response. It is regarded as a form of exhibition of anger, hostility, frustration, and dissatisfaction. Each human being exhibits anger, impulsivity and hostility at times which may differ quantitatively as well as qualitatively.

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It is important to know that not all aggression is bad. Being aggressive at acts of injustice or wrong-doings is perfectly healthy but is dangerous when at extreme levels.

Factors leading to aggressive behaviours

Earlier psychologists in the field of behaviourism proposed a connection between aggression and frustration calling it the frustration-aggression hypothesis. (Dollard et al., 1939; Miller et al., 1941). The hypothesis states that aggression is a reaction due to the frustration in an individual. Many sources of frustration can lead to aggressive behaviours. For example, severe pain produces negative sensations that are often intense and uncontrollable, leading to frustration and often aggressive acts towards the nearest available targets. (Berkowitz, 1993) There is some evidence that aggression has at least partially, a genetic basis. Studies of twins reared together and apart have shown that if one of the twins exhibits aggressive behaviour the other twin exhibits violent behaviour too. (Miles & Carrey, 1997)

There are certain areas of brain that seem to control the aggressive responses. The frontal lobes, amygdale, and other structures of the limbic system have shown to trigger aggressive responses when evoked. (Adams., 1968; Yang et al., 2010)

There are certain chemical influences on aggression. Higher levels of testosterone, a male sex hormone and lower levels of serotonin lead to aggression and aggressive behaviours.

The dual-hormone hypothesis suggests that testosterone; a male sex hormone is positively associated with status-seeking tendencies such as aggression and dominance, particularly in individuals with low levels of cortisol, a hormone released under stress. The hypothesis states that the combination of high testosterone levels and low cortisol levels has linked to elevated levels of aggression.

Hostile attribution bias has been viewed as a vital cognitive factor influencing the progression of aggression in an individual.

In some people a certain gene or a complex of genes influences the susceptibility of aggressive behaviours in a stimulating environment, thereby, exhibiting the role of genetic and environmental factors together.

Theories of Aggression

The most prominent theories of aggression can be broadly divided into, theories that-

1. *View aggression as an instinct-* Many early researchers, including Sigmund Freud (1930), believed that aggression was a basic human instinct. There are a plethora of theories in the literature of psychology that explain aggression and the aggressive behaviours as a basic human instinct and that it occurs because each and every individual is born with an innate aggressive instinct that is an inherent tendency to exhibit violent behaviour.
2. *View aggression as a consequence of frustration-* One common source of violent behaviour is frustration, which occurs when an individual is prevented from reaching the desired aim. The impending frustration acts a source for aggressive acts in congruence with the frustration-aggression hypothesis. Theorists in opposition mention that this theoretical perspective does not place an importance to the other factors leading to violence.

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3. *Suggest that aggression is a learned behaviour-* The social learning theory views aggression as a behaviour that is learned, either by watching ideal models getting reinforced for violent behaviours or by explicit observation or imitation of others.

Religiosity and Aggression

Religiosity has been positively associated with subjective well-being, happiness, a grateful outlook in life and it has also been negatively associated with aggression, i.e. with higher levels of religiosity, the aggression level in an individual tend to significantly reduce.

With theoretical support, it has been seen that religiosity plays a significant role in reducing the aggressive levels in people. Frequent visiting of religious places, intrinsic religiosity, a family environment where religiosity is practised, leads to lower aggressive behaviour in people.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Björkqvist (2018) conducted the following research to examine the role of sex differences in aggression. The results indicated that both the genders were equally verbally aggressive, where women made use of more indirect forms of aggressive behaviour whereas men portrayed physically aggressive behaviour.

Kraus et al. (2015) premeditated the following research to identify the link between religiosity and the other facets of being religious with a general feeling of being grateful. The results indicated that religious efficacy and having a religious peer group significantly predicted an individual's disposition to feel grateful.

Schnabel (2015) conducted the following research to examine whether or not women are innately more religious to men. The research findings indicated that Christian women had significantly higher religiosity levels as and when compared to men, however, the results did not replicate for the non-Christian women.

Tsang et al. (2012) conducted a research to examine the relationship between religion and gratitude. The results indicated that intrinsic religiosity was positively associated with gratitude.

Holmes & Lochman (2012) directed the following research to examine the effect of parent and preadolescent religiosity on the aggression levels of a sample of 157 African American preadolescents. The results exhibited that higher levels of parental and intrinsic religiosity predicted lower aggression among the preadolescents.

METHODOLOGY

Aim: The following research intends to measure the level of religiosity, disposition to be grateful and the level of aggression among male and female undergraduate students. The research aims to provide significant knowledge regarding the same.

Hypothesis

H1: There will be a significant difference between religiosity and gratitude among male and female undergraduate students.

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- H2:** There will be a significant difference between religiosity and aggression among male and female undergraduate students.
- H3:** There will be a significant relationship between the religiosity, gratitude and aggression among male and female undergraduate students.
- H4:** There will be a significant effect of religiosity on gratitude among male and female undergraduate students
- H5:** There will be a significant effect of religiosity on aggression among male and female undergraduate students.

Sample

A sample consisting of 100 participants was selected for the present study that was further divided into two groups of 50 one group with female undergraduate students and the other with male undergraduate students. Purposive sampling was used for this data.

Tools employed

- 1. Religiosity Scale (RS)** – The Religiosity Scale developed by Dr. L.I. Bhushan in 1970 intends to measure the degree to which an individual can be identified as religious.
- 2. Gratitude Questionnaire 6 (GQ6)** - GQ-6 is a six -item self-report questionnaire premeditated to assess an individual differences experience of gratitude in daily life.
- 3. Aggression Scale (AS-MB)** - The aggression scale questionnaire developed by Dr. G.P Mathur and Dr. Raj Kumari Bhatnagar intends to measure the aggression level of individuals above the age of 14.

Procedure

The data was collected from college going students from Delhi NCR. The subjects were made comfortable and a rapport was build with them. The aim and the purpose of the study was explained. The data was collected with the help of 3 questionnaires- Religiosity scale, GQ-6, and the Aggression scale. The subjects were provided with all the instructions before filling the questionnaire. All the doubts and queries were cleared beforehand. With the help of the informed consent, the subject's consent to perform in the study was taken and the confidentiality was maintained. The results were calculated and analyzed with the help of the manual.

Statistical Analysis

The data analysis was done by the IBM SPSS 20.0(statistical package for social sciences) so as to provide significant and efficient relationships between the three variables. The statistical techniques used were independent samples t-test, correlation and linear regression.

RESULTS

Table I Exhibits the total mean scores, standard deviation and the t - scores for religiosity, gratitude and aggression in the/among male and female undergraduate students.

| Variable | Gender | N | Mean | Standard deviation | t |
|-------------|---------|----|--------|--------------------|---------|
| Religiosity | Males | 50 | 123.94 | 18.093 | 0.711 |
| | Females | 50 | 117.46 | 16.964 | |
| Gratitude | Males | 50 | 30.94 | 5.984 | 1.847 |
| | Females | 50 | 30.18 | 4.614 | |
| Aggression | Males | 50 | 187.92 | 22.079 | - 1.073 |
| | Females | 50 | 192.66 | 22.098 | |

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The above table shows that there is no significant difference between the religiosity, gratitude and aggression of the male and female undergraduate students. But it can be inferred that the male undergraduate students exhibited higher religiosity levels as and when compared with the female undergraduate students.

Schnabel (2015) in this theoretical review examined the links between gender differences and religiosity. The research findings indicated that Christian women had significantly higher religiosity levels as and when compared to men, however, the results did not replicate for the non-Christian women. The above mentioned research demonstrates the gender differences in the religiosity levels by highlighting that although women tend to be more religious than men due to certain innate biological factors, women belonging from other cultures as that of Christianity do not always achieve the highest scores on all the measures of religiosity, thereby *supporting* the results in the study.

It can also be seen that there is a significant mean difference in the aggression levels of the male and female undergraduate students with the female undergraduate students exhibiting higher aggression levels, however, there is no significant gender difference in the gratitude levels.

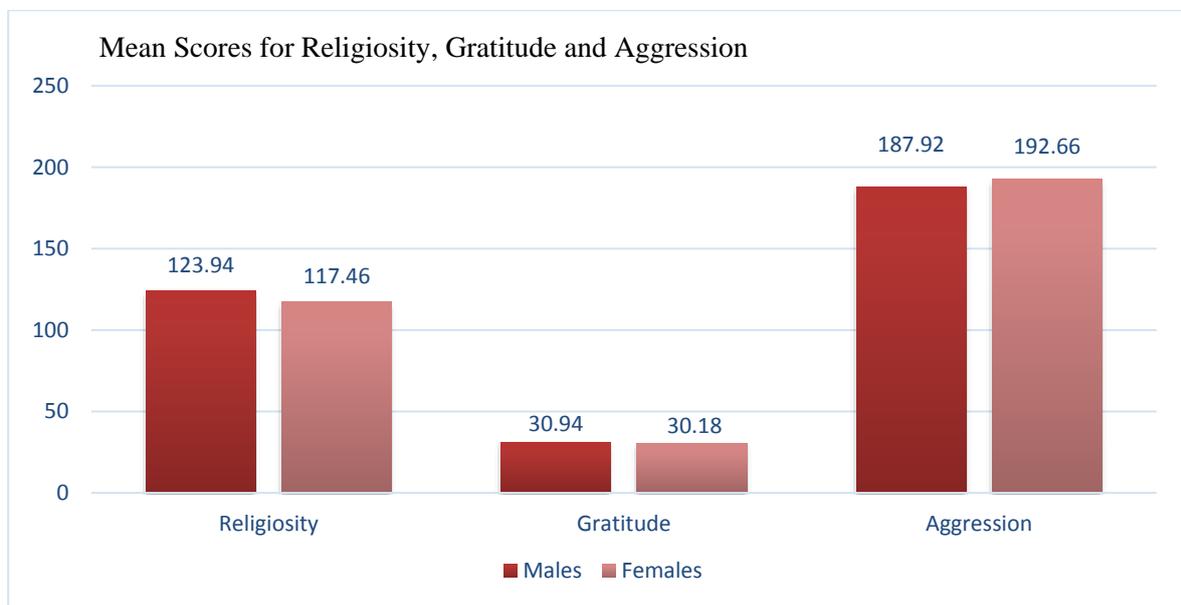


Figure. 1 The following graph shows the mean scores for religiosity, gratitude and aggression.

The graph also depicts that there is a noticeable mean difference in the religiosity and aggression levels between the male and female undergraduate students, however, there is no significant mean difference in the gratitude levels.

Table II Shows the correlation matrix-

| Variables | Religiosity | Gratitude | Aggression |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|------------|
| Religiosity | - | | |
| Gratitude | .321** | - | |
| Aggression | .007 | .064 | - |

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 tailed)

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With the help of table II, it can be inferred that there is a significant positive relationship of religiosity with gratitude at the 0.01 level. The table also shows that there is no significant relationship between religiosity and aggression as well as gratitude and aggression among the male and female undergraduate students.

Table III Linear Regression analysis for religiosity, gratitude and aggression among the male and female undergraduate students.

| Variables | Gratitude | | | | Aggression | | | |
|--------------------|-----------|------------|------|---------|------------|------------|------|------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | B | Std. Error | Beta | t |
| Religiosity | .096 | .029 | .321 | 3.359** | .009 | .126 | .007 | .072 |

** Significant at the 0.01 level of significance.

The above-mentioned table exhibits that religiosity has a significant effect (R square = 0.103) on the gratitude levels of the male and female undergraduate students; however, no significant effect has been seen on the aggression levels of the undergraduates.

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine whether or not the level of religiosity impacted the gratitude and aggression levels among a sample of male and female undergraduate students. The results indicate that:

a) Mean differences between religiosity, gratitude, and aggression-

The mean differences between the levels of religiosity, gratitude, and aggression of the undergraduate students as depicted in Figure 1 exhibits significant gender differences between the religiosity and aggression levels among the undergraduate students; however, there is no significant gender difference in the gratitude levels.

It can also be seen from figure 1 that there is a significant mean difference in the aggression levels of the male and female undergraduate students with the female undergraduate students exhibiting higher aggression levels and lower religiosity levels.

b) t-test analysis

The results computed in Table I exhibit the total mean scores, standard deviation, and the t - scores for the variables used in the study. Since the t- values of all the three variables i.e. religiosity, gratitude, and aggression is greater than 0.05 and 0.01 ($p > 0.05$ & $p > 0.01$) there is no significant difference between the religiosity, gratitude, and aggression among the male and female undergraduate students at the 0.05 or 0.01 level of significance. Since the ($p > 0.05$) we have no evidence to prove H1 and H2 which indicated that there will be a significant difference between religiosity and gratitude as well as religiosity and aggression of male and female undergraduate students.

c) Correlation matrix between religiosity, gratitude, and aggression.

With the help of table II, it can be inferred that there is a significant positive relationship of religiosity with gratitude as the p-value i.e. 0.321 is less than 0.01 ($r = 0.321$, $p < 0.01$) and it positively associated with both the variables at the 0.01 level of significance.

A significant positive relationship between the variables, religiosity and gratitude indicates that with an increase in the gratitude level the religiosity level would also increase and vice

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versa. Aligning with the results, Tsang et al. (2012) conducted a research to examine the relationship between religion and gratitude. The results indicated that intrinsic religiosity was positively associated with gratitude. Since the $p < 0.01$ for the correlation between gratitude and religiosity with the there is an overwhelming evidence to partially prove H3 which indicated that there is a significant relationship between the religiosity, gratitude and aggression.

The results also illustrate that there is no significant relationship between religiosity and aggression ($r = 0.007$ $p > 0.01$) among the male and female undergraduate students. In contrary to the results in the present study, Holmes et al. (2012) directed the following research to examine whether or not parental as well as pre-adolescent religiosity was related to lower levels of aggression in the teenagers. The results exhibited that preadolescent intrinsic religiosity and frequent attendances to religious place significantly produced lower levels of aggression amongst the teenagers.

The reasons as to why aggression was not related to religiosity in the present study could be inadequate sample size, central tendency error, changing family environments and patterns, modernisation, etc. One of the major reasons could be the fading religious faiths and beliefs in the young adults.

d) Linear Regression analysis

The results computed in Table III show that religiosity has a significant effect on gratitude of the male and female undergraduate students; however, no significant relationship has been seen on the aggression levels of the undergraduates.

From the results, it can be inferred that religiosity predicted 10% (R square = 0.103) of the variance in the gratitude levels of the male and female undergraduate students. The R square value i.e. 0.103 explains that 10% of the undergraduate students religiosity impacted their gratitude levels.

Aligning with the above results (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000 Harpman, 2004) in their respective researches indicated that religiosity acts as a motivator for people to be grateful or thankful.

Desmond et al. (2015) exhibited that the people who possess higher religiosity tend to be more gratifying than people who are not religious. Since the $p < 0.01$ there is an overwhelming evidence to prove H4 which indicated that there will be a significant effect of religiosity on gratitude.

From the results, it can also be seen that although religiosity predicted 10% of the gratitude levels in the undergraduates it did not predict (R square = 0.000) the aggression levels among the male and female undergraduate students. The R square value i.e. 0.000 explains that 0% of the undergraduate student's religiosity impacted their aggression levels. Since the $p > 0.01$ we fail to prove H5 which indicated that there is a significant effect of religiosity on aggression among male and female undergraduate students.

Contrary to the results, Storch (202) in his theoretical review revealed that intrinsic religiosity was negatively associated with aggression.

CONCLUSION

The present study sought to determine whether or not the level of religiosity impacted the levels of gratitude and aggression among a sample (N = 100) of male and female undergraduate students. The research also aimed to evaluate the gender differences associated with the levels of religiosity, gratitude, and aggression among the undergraduates. The analysis of the results exhibited that there was no significant difference between the three variables at the 0.005 level of significance although there was a significant mean difference amid the male and female undergraduate students as the male undergraduates possessed higher religiosity and lower aggression as and when compared with the female undergraduates who possessed slightly lower religiosity levels and a higher aggression levels. There was no significant difference in the disposition of the male and female undergraduates to be grateful. The correlation matrix indicated a significant positive relationship between religiosity and gratitude of the sample and the linear regression analysis exhibited that 10% of the gratitude of the young adults was predicted by their religiosity levels.

Limitations

There are a few limitations pertaining to the present study. First, the data only comprises of a total of 100 people as the sample for the study which might not be representative of the whole population. Second, the research had only focused on the undergraduate students. The results could have potentially differed if it were on a sample of older adults. Third, socially acceptable answers could have impeded the results. Fourth, extraneous variables could have potentially led to a central tendency bias. Fifth, the effect of intrinsic and religiosity as well as family religiosity was not measured which could have potentially provided some insight to how religiosity is reared in a family and the level of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity could also have been measured.

Future recommendations

There are few suggestions that can be imbibed by the researches in the field of psychology to examine the associations between religiosity, gratitude, and aggression. The current study consisted of a total 100 people, with a more representative sample of population the results can differ. Apart from young adults, the results could significantly differ with a sample of older adults. Family or parental religiosity can also be measured as to see the effect of intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity in the children.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

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