

Atheist-Prejudice in India as Related to Religiosity

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ABSTRACT

This study highlights the levels of Anti-atheist prejudice in relationship to religiosity in Indian population. Religiosity is the state of being religious, having a belief in God or higher power and is inclusive of institutional practices or rituals together with a commitment to organized religion. Anti-atheist prejudice is the negative attitude towards people who do not believe in God which is inclusive of attitudes like perceived immorality, untrustworthy and even criminal intent. This study has incorporated the use of standardised questionnaires of 'Dimensions of Religiosity Scale' to measure religiosity; and 'Negative attitude towards Atheist Scale' and 'Atheist Negativity Scale' to measure anti-atheist prejudice in people of Indian nationality (N=166) gathered with use of convenience and snowball sampling. A significant positive relationship was found between anti-atheist prejudice and domains of religiosity in Indian population. Religiosity along with its dimensions of Pre-occupation, Conviction, Emotional Involvement and Guidance, have also found to be significant predictors of anti-atheist prejudice. This paper can support the findings done by researches in the western countries wherein the relationship between religiosity and anti-atheist prejudice have been explored and has replicated similar results in the Indian setting.

Keywords: *Religiosity, Anti-Atheist Prejudice, Terror Management Theory*

Allport (1954) explaining the nature of prejudice wrote that it was universal in all human societies for a child to be regarded as a member of their parent's group. This can be inclusive of race, religion, social and even socio-economic status. There is an inheritance of traditions, loyalties and even prejudices. Giving the two basic ingredients of prejudices Allport (1954) explained that it could firstly include 'derogation' which is directed towards people that do not belong to the one's group then comes 'stereotyping' or over generalizing attributes to that group which is outside to one's own. Anti-Atheist Prejudice can be simply defined as the negative attitude towards people who do not believe in God. It consists of various features of this negative attitude like perceived immorality, untrustworthy and even criminal image (Gervais et.al., 2011). Religiosity has been proved to be a powerful predictor of anti-atheist prejudice (Edgell et al., 2006) and strong belief in God has marked as a potent contributor to distrust towards atheists (Gervais et al., 2011). Religiosity is the quality or state of being religious. It can be further explained as a belief in

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God or higher power, inclusive of institutional practices or rituals together with a commitment to organized religion (Zinbauer et al. 1997).

It has been reported across various literature that religious people hold more positive attitudes towards people who belong to a religious group (Jackson & Hunsberger, 1999) whereas negative attitude and stereotypes against people who are non-religious (Harper, 2007). Among the early studies on dimensions of religiosity (e.g. religious fundamentalism, intrinsic religiosity) it was found that they were correlated negatively with attitudes towards people who violate their own religious worldviews like Atheists, Muslims, Homosexuals etc (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Duck and Hunsberger, 1999; Rowatt & Franklin 2004; Rowatt, Franklin & Cotton, 2005; Whitley & Lee, 2000).

Many researches on atheism and attitude towards atheism mostly come from the west. A 2006 published study on Americans reported that 47.6% of respondents said that they would disapprove of their child marrying an atheist (Edgell et al., 2006). A later study by the same researcher reported that 41.9% of respondents saw atheists not fitting in their vision of American society and 39.6% of respondents reported being on unhappy on the growing number of non-religious people in America (Edgell et al., 2016). A few researches of the past have also reported that atheists in general are viewed as criminal (Edgell et al. 2006; Gervais, 2014) and untrustworthy (Gervais et al, 2011). Through many studies it has been reported that many people believe that without God there would be no moral thus such people would be worthy of distrust (Edgell et al., 2006; Gervais, 2014). Studies have revealed that descriptions of criminal untrustworthy individuals have been to be an equivalent representative as that of an atheist. This was in contrast to people belonging to any other religious or ethnic group like Christians, Muslims, homosexuals, Jewish or feminists. It was seen that only rapists were distrusted to a comparable degree to that of atheists. Through the study it was also reported that belief in God was significantly associated with 'distrust' of atheists. Religious participants were more likely to discriminate atheists when choosing candidates for high-trust jobs (Gervais, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The sample consisted of 166 participants (N=166) among which 61.4% are males and 38.6 % are females; and the mean age of respondents is 28. There have been no set exclusion criteria with regards to educational qualification. The inclusion criteria of age was kept 18 and above for the study. The sample consisted of Hindus (60.2%), Christians (13.3%), Buddhists (7.2%), Non-religious (10.8%) and others (5.4%). The sampling was based on convenience and snowball sampling.

Instruments

Measures were used in this study,

Dimensions of Religiosity Scale (DiDuca and Joseph, 2007): This scale includes a total of 20 items relating to 4 sub dimensions of religiosity inclusive of preoccupation, guidance, conviction, and emotional involvement. Each subscale has an already found reliability of 0.94 for Emotional Involvement, 0.95 for Conviction, 0.94 for Preoccupation, and 0.90 for Guidance. The subscales are also highly inter-correlated (lowest $r = 0.83$, $p < 0.001$), and the total scale was also highly internally reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.95 (Joseph et al., 2007).

The items are designed to be answered on likert scale spreading across 1 to 5 where 1 is

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'Strongly Disagree', 2 is 'Disagree', 3 is 'Neither agree nor disagree', 4 is 'Agree' and 5 is 'Strongly Agree'. Certain items were altered a little keeping in mind the research interest and for qualitative purposes. E.g. Item 5 which was originally "*I am sure that Christ exists*" which was modified to '*I am sure that God exists*'. Similarly item 8 was modified from '*My thoughts turn to Jesus everyday*' to '*My thoughts turn to God everyday*'; item 13 was modified from '*I try to follow the laws laid down in the Bible*' to '*I try to follow the laws laid down in the religious books*'; item 14 was modified from '*I know that Jesus will always be there for me*' to '*I know that God will always be there for me*'; item 17 was modified from '*When I am feeling miserable, thinking about Jesus helps me to cheer up*' to '*When I am feeling miserable, thinking about God helps me to cheer up*'; item 18 was modified from '*I like to talk about Jesus*' to '*I like to talk about God*'; and finally item 19 was modified from '*Jesus' life is an example to me*' to '*God's life is an example to me*'. The rationale behind this modification is that the questionnaire is to be tested on population in India which is a secular country with people from various religious affiliations

Negative Attitude toward Atheists Scale (Gervais, 2011): For measuring prejudice the study undertook the 'Negative Attitudes toward Atheists Scale' by Gervais (2011). This is a one dimension 7 item scale measure in 5 point likert scale where 1 is 'Strongly Disagree', 2 is 'Disagree', 3 is 'Neither agree nor disagree', 4 is 'Agree' and 5 is 'Strongly Agree'. This questionnaire has a reliability coefficient with alpha value of .90 ($\alpha = .90$). Item 2 and 6 had been modified for qualitative purposes keeping in view the research interests of the study. Item 2 was modified from '*I strongly believe that church and state should be kept separate*' to '*I strongly believe that church/temples/mosques and state/country should be kept separate*'; and item 6 was modified from '*I would not at all be bothered by a President who did not have religious beliefs*' to '*I would not all be bothered by a President/Prime Minister who did not have religious beliefs*'.

Atheist Negativity Scale – (Bloesch et al., 2005): Another measure of prejudice is taken by means of Atheist Negativity Scale (Bloesch et al., 2005) which is a brief 5 item scale with internal consistency was 0.33 which also reported a high face validity. The items are to be answered on a 7 point scale where in 1 is 'Strongly Disagree', 2 is 'Disagree', 3 is 'Somewhat Disagree', 4 is Neither Agree nor Disagree', 5 is 'Somewhat Agree', 6 is 'Agree' and 7 is 'Strongly Agree'.

Procedure

The data was collected through means of Google forms. The forms were distributed through various means of social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp. The minimum age of the participant had to be 18 years and above and of Indian nationality. The data was collected by means of convenience and snowball sampling.

RESULTS

The descriptive stats for (N = 166) are as follows: Religiosity Scale (N = 166, M = 62.94, SD = 21.35), Negative Attitude Towards Atheists Scale (M = 19.27, SD = 3.16) and Atheist Negative Scale (M = 11.68, SD = 5.65).

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Table 4.1: Correlations between Independent and Dependent Variables

		<i>Dimensions of Religiosity Scale</i>		<i>Negative Attitude Towards Atheists Negativity Scale</i>	
<i>Religiosity Score</i>	<i>TOTAL</i>	Pearson Correlation	1	.363**	.363**
		Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000
		N	166	166	166
<i>Negative Towards TOTAL Score</i>	<i>Attitude Towards Atheists</i>	Pearson Correlation	.363**	1	.435**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000
		N	166	166	166
<i>Atheist Scale</i>	<i>Negativity</i>	Pearson Correlation	.363**	.435**	1
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	
		N	166	166	166

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

Table 4.1 represents the levels of correlation between religiosity total score, negative attitude towards atheists scale and atheist negativity scale, which have stood to be significant at 0.01 level.

Table 4.2: Regression Table for Dependent Variables (Religiosity = Independent Variable)

<i>Dependent Variable</i>	R	R²	Std. Error	t	F	Sig.
<i>Negative Attitude Towards Atheist Scale</i>	0.363.	0.132	.011	4.988	24.878	.000**
<i>Atheist Negativity Scale</i>	0.363	0.132	.019	4.989	24.882	.000**

*Note: ** Significant at 0.001*

Table 4.2 represent the regression values of religiosity to negative attitude towards atheists scale and atheist negativity scale which have stood to be significant at 0.001 level.

Table 4.3: Regression table with Negative towards Attitude Scale as Dependent Variable

<i>Independent Variables</i>	R	R²	Std. Error	T	F	Sig.
<i>Pre-Occupation</i>	0.409	0.167	.044	5.736	32.905	.000**
<i>Conviction</i>	0.265	0.070	.038	3.524	12.416	.001**
<i>Emotional Involvement</i>	0.331	0.110	0.40	4.496	20.218	.000**
<i>Guidance</i>	0.398	0.158	0.44	5.556	30.868	.000**

*Note: ** Significant at 0.001*

Table 4.3 represents the regression values of different dimensions of religiosity scale to negative attitude towards atheists scale which have stood to be significant at 0.001 level.

Table 4.4: Regression table with Atheist Negativity Scale as Dependent Variable

<i>Independent Variables</i>	R	R²	Std. Error	T	F	Sig.
<i>Pre-Occupation</i>	0.412	0.170	.078	5.790	33.522	.000**
<i>Conviction</i>	0.301	0.090	.067	4.037	16.300	.000**
<i>Emotional Involvement</i>	0.338	0.114	0.72	4.603	21.184	.000**
<i>Guidance</i>	0.344	0.118	0.80	4.691	2.002	.000**

*Note: **Significant at 0.001*

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Table 4.4 represents the regression values of different dimensions of religiosity scale to atheist negativity scale which have stood to be significant at 0.001 level.

DISCUSSION

It was found from the study that ‘Religiosity’ has a significant relationship with Atheist Prejudice. Moreover, Religiosity can also be a predictor to Atheist prejudice which has been found in the study with significant positive relationship using regression analysis. The findings can also be supported from early studies that studied inter-group bias where people were reported to hold biases against those who are out of their own groups (Hewstone et al., 2002). This can be attributed to the feelings within the people who hold extreme world views based on their religious beliefs are likely to use these prejudices as a defensive strategy of denial or even suppression (Cook et al., 2015). The levels of Religiosity along with its dimensions of Pre-occupation, Conviction, Emotional Involvement and Guidance were found to be effective predictors of Anti-Atheist prejudice which have been reported through significant values from the Regression Analysis done in this paper. Past studies on the same have found that religiosity is significantly predictive of negative attitudes towards people who violate their religious world views inclusive of Atheists (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992; Duck and Hunsberger, 1999; Rowatt & Franklin, 2004; Rowatt et al., 2005; Whitley & Lee, 2000). Throughout past studies religiosity has been a strong predictor of anti-atheist prejudice (Edgell et al., 2016). Similar findings have also been seen in early researches where Atheists have thought to be untrustworthy (Gervais et al, 2011). Early studies done in United States of America have also reported that a significant number of people reported that they would disapprove of their child marrying an atheist (Edgell et al., 2006). Atheists are also thought to be immoral throughout past studies (Cook et al, 2015; Wright & Nichols, 2014). Past studies have also reported that people who do not believe in God are thought to have no moral (Edgill et al., 2006; Gervais et al., 2014).

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interests.

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