Religiosity, Social distance and Well-being among Hindu and Muslim Young adults

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ABSTRACT

In the global work environment, it is important to have cordial relationship between the diverse workforce for proper functioning of the organization as well as the well-being of the employees in the organization. Religious orthodoxy and wider social distance between the diverse groups can be a threat for the organizations. The present study aimed at assessing role of religiosity and social distance in predicting well-being in two different communities (Hindus and Muslims) in India. The sample comprises 100 young adults (50 each from both the groups) from different organizations of Delhi city. Result revealed significant difference on the dimensions of religiosity and well-being between the two groups, but not for the dimension of social distance. Religiosity has been found to be positively correlated with well-being, while social distance was found to be negatively correlated with well-being. Social distance has emerged as strong predictor of well-being. Further, the implications of the results for the two groups in context of work environment are discussed.

Keywords: Religiosity, Social distance, Well-being, Hindu, Muslim, Young adults.

Indian society is characterized by diverse religious beliefs and practices, which gives a vibrant color to its culture, but the relationship between the different religious communities (especially Hindus and Muslims) has been characterized by continuous tension and inter-communal violence. Both in society and organizations, people of same religion, culture and language prefer to make their own group and segregate from other groups. This social distance creates the feeling of prejudice, hate and non-cooperation between the groups. This condition is not only a threat for the nation but also for the organizations which have diverse work-force. On one hand diversity brings variety of benefits to the organization like greater adaptability, broader service range, variety of ideas and creativity etc. but on other hand poses lots of challenges like conflict between the groups and resistance to change. It not only hampers the proper functioning of organization but also the well-being of the employees. Social distance, poor communication, hate

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and prejudice between the groups adversely affect the performance and well-being of the employees.

Well-being is the ultimate goal of life. It is a complex construct that concerns optimal experience and functioning**.** Well being is defined as life satisfaction, the presence of positive effect, and a relative absence of negative effect. Together the three components are often referred to as happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Present research on well-being has been derived from two general perspectives of Subjective well-being: the hedonic approach, which focuses on happiness and defines well-being in terms of pleasure attainment and pain avoidance; and the eudemonic approach, which focuses on meaning and self-realization and defines well-being in terms of the degree to which a person is fully functioning (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

There are many pathways to achieve good mental health and wellbeing in life, but significance of religiosity and social relationships in achieving happiness and well-being in human life is well articulated in the literature.

Religiosity refers to a broad set of beliefs and behaviors centered on the sacred (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009). It is a comprehensive sociological term used to refer to the numerous aspects of religious activity, dedication and belief (Wani & Khan, 2015).

It has been found that religious people, on average, experience greater well-being than non-religious people (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Donovan & Halpern, 2002; Helliwell & Putnam, 2005; Williams & Sternthal, 2007). There are many studies from Christian samples which has similar findings. For example, the frequency of attending churches has been found to be positively related to life satisfaction (e.g., Diener & Seligman, 2004; Donovan & Halpern, 2002; Ellison & Levin, 1998; Helliwell & Putnam, 2005). Again, religiously active people have been reported with good physical health and long life (Levin & Schiller, 1987; McIntosh & Spilka, 1990; Williams & Sternthal, 2007).

In western countries like North America and Europe, religious people report higher levels of happiness and satisfaction with life (e.g., Poloma & Pendleton, 1990). Moreover, people who have religious beliefs report higher life satisfaction than those who declare themselves atheists (e.g., Donovan & Halpern, 2002; Helliwell & Putnam, 2005) and have lower suicide rates (Helliwell & Putnam, 2005).

In India, Khan, Ahmad, Hamdan, Mustaffa and Tahir (2014) in their study on 400 Indian students, found that religiosity is significantly influencing psychological strengths and subjective well-being of the participants.

Similarly, Sreekumar (2008) explored the nature and pattern of relationship of certain religious aspects like religious beliefs, religious practices, and spirituality with subjective well-being on 350 participants in Kerala. The results obtained in this study indicated that religious beliefs,

practices and spirituality are positively associated with subjective well-being. Religious believes provide a sense of well-being through guidance, a sense of right and wrong and a connection to God (Sreekumar, 2008).

Wani and Khan (2015) conducted their study on 100 Indian participants divided into two groups-Optimists and Pessimists, to find out the influence of religiosity on subjective well-being. The obtained results revealed that religiosity is a significant predictor of subjective well-being in both the groups however the degree of correlation between religiosity and subjective well being is higher for optimist group.

The studies mentioned above have highlighted the positive effect of religiosity on mankind, however, literature have also revealed the negative effect of religiosity on society as a whole where different religious groups are interacting with each other. Many studies on religion indicates a significant relationship between certain kinds of religious commitment and prejudice towards members of minority groups or persons of divergent ideological beliefs (Stouffer, 1955; Glock and stark, 1966; Rokeach, 1960; Allport,1954, 1966), which determines the degree of social distance between these majority and minority groups in the society. Allport explained this relationship due to some intervening variables like type of personality and type of believes. He argued that beliefs are of two kinds: extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic believers use religion as an instrument to fulfil their self-interest. They do not serve the religion, rather religion serves for them. This kind of religious belief is found to be positively related with sense of prejudice for out-group members. While on other hand   intrinsic believers do not use their religion for self-interest. Their orientation is universalistic, stressing love, compassion and brotherhood. Hence they are found to be more tolerant towards the out-group (Allport 1966; Allport and Ross, 1967) However, it has been found that militant and authoritarian personality type is positively related with prejudice and social distance with out-group members (Johnson, 1977).

Social distance is defined as "grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally" (Park, 1924). It refers the "degree of sympathetic understanding that exists between two persons or between a person (personal distance) and a group (personal-group distance)" (Bogardus, 1933). It has been found that, individuals typically are more comfortable with others of perceived similarity and so maintain a closer social distance with them. On other hand, if they find their in-group more favourably, they are likely to express a self-serving bias against out-group members (Mayhew et al. 1995; Parrillo, 2011).

Verma and Upadhayay (1984) conducted a study in India on undergraduate students to measure their attitude towards 7 ethnic groups. Results revealed a significant positive correlation between high religiosity and weak feeling of social distance. The sample as a whole appeared to desire a distant relationship with Sindhis, Christians, and Muslims and a closer relationship with

Brahmins and Hindus. Subjects with high religiosity were significantly less likely to express a desire for social distance with any ethnic group.

Tausch, Hewstone and Roy (2009) conducted their study on 87 students (50 Hindus and 37 Muslims) in Bhubaneswar, Orissa in context of Hindu-Muslim relationship in India and found no differences between Hindus and Muslims on the measure of social distance. Contact quantity was found to be positively associated with reduced intergroup anxiety and symbolic threat. Frequent interactions between the groups reduce anxiety about future interactions and reduce perceptions that out-group members have different values, morals and norms.

Rationale
Today organizations are becoming more and more cross cultural. People from different countries, ethnicity, language and culture need to work together to achieve the organizational goals. On one hand this diversity brings variety of benefits to the organization but on other hand poses lots of challenges. An organization's success depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and its benefits through effective management of its diverse work force.

Sometimes employees maintain certain degree of social distance from others, based on their religious and ideological beliefs. People from same religion, culture, language and beliefs prefer to make their own group and segregate from other groups. This social distance creates the feeling of prejudice, hate and non-cooperation between the groups, which has an adverse affect on the proper functioning of the organization as well as the well-being of its employees. This condition is not only a threat for the organizations but also for the nation as whole. Hence there is a need to investigate the probable predictors which can positively contribute to the well-being of individuals especially the young adults who are future leaders of the organizations.

Majority of studies have focused on causes, conditions and predictors of conflicts and violence between Hindus and Muslims in India, but little research has been done to study the impact of this conflict and social distance on the well-being of individuals especially the young adults. Hence there is a need to investigate the probable predictors which can positively contribute to the well-being of these two communities and can foster a harmonious relationship between them.

Aim
The present study aimed to see the predictability of religiosity and social distance on well-being of Hindu and Muslim young adults.

OBJECTIVES
1. To see the difference on the measure of religiosity, social distance and well-being among Hindu and Muslim young adults.
2. To see the relationship among Religiosity, Social distance and Well-being in Hindu and Muslim young adults.

3. To see the predictive role of Religiosity on well-being of Hindu and Muslim young adults.

4. To see the predictive role of Social distance on well-being of Hindu and Muslim young adults.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

A total sample of 100 participants, 50 Hindus and 50 Muslims young adults (age ranging from 18 to 30 years) were selected from various organizations of Delhi city.

Measures

1. **Socio-demographic Data Sheet:** A self made semi-structured data sheet was used to collect the information regarding the demographic variables like age, gender, religion, educational qualification, native place and family income of the participants.

2. **Salience in Religious Commitment Scale (Roof & Perkins, 1975)** was used to measure the extent to which the participants consider their religious beliefs to be important, both in general and when making decisions. The scale was developed as part of a study to measure the relationship of religious salience with orthodoxy, political conservatism, prejudice and racism. This is a short scale with only three items, scores ranging from 3 to 11. The scale has high face validity with co-efficient of correlation $r = 0.81$ and reliability is 0.682.

3. **Bogardus Social Distance scale (1924):** It is a psychological attitude scale which has years of legacy in measuring prejudice in inter-group relationship, widely used in several disciplines like sociology, political science, psychology, language studies, and education. The scale contained seven possible levels of acceptance that the respondents could feel toward out-group members. These levels permitted respondents to give multiple answers about accepting a person from a particular group as 1) a family member by marriage, 2) as a close friend, 3) as my neighbor, 4) as my co-worker, 5) as a speaking acquaintance only, 6) as visitors only to my country, and 7) bar from my country. The score ranges from 1 to 7—with 1 representing the closest distance and 7 representing the farthest distance from the out-group.

4. **Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being Scale (WEMWBS):** WEMWBS is a 14 item scale of mental well-being covering subjective well-being and psychological functioning, in which all items are worded positively and address aspects of positive mental health. It is a 5-point Likert scale. The minimum scale score is 14 and the maximum is 70. The reliability of the scale is 0.84.

Procedure

A sample of 100 participants, age ranging from 18 to 30 years, was chosen randomly from various organizations of Delhi city. A formal consent was taken before administering the tests on the participants. The obtained data were analyzed with the help of SPSS-21. Descriptive as well

as inferential statistics was used to analyze the results. t-test was done to see the difference where as product moment correlation was done to see the relationship between the variables. Linear regression was done to see the predictability of religiosity and social distance on well-being of the groups.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Mean and SD of age of the participants (N=100)

Characteristics	Groups				Total (N=100)	
	Hindus(n=50)		Muslims(n=50)			
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Age	26.66	2.92	25.72	2.99	26.19	2.98

100 participants were included in the study. Mean age of Hindu participants was found 26.66 and of Muslim participants was 25.72 years. The mean age for total population was found to be 26.19 years.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of demographic characteristics of participants (N=100)

Demographics	Groups				Total (N=100)	
	Hindus (n=50)		Muslims (n=50)			
	f	%	f	%	f	%
Gender						
Male	24	48%	38	76%	62	62%
Female	26	52%	12	24%	38	38%
Education Qualification						
Senior secondary	0	0%	1	2%	1	1%
Graduate	22	44%	19	38%	41	41%
Post-graduate	28	56%	30	60%	58	58%
Native place						
Urban	41	82%	25	50%	66	66%
Rural	9	18%	25	50%	34	34%
Family Income						
Below 10,000	1	2%	5	10%	6	6%
10,000 to 20,000	4	8%	9	18%	13	13%
20,000 to 30,000	4	8%	9	18%	13	13%
Above 30,000	41	82%	27	54%	68	68%

In the sample, majority of participants were male (62%), However, in Hindu group female (52%) were more in number than males (24%). Most of the participants were post –graduate (58%). The range of family income of the participants varied from above 30,000 (68%) to below 10,000 (6%). Majority of participants were from urban background (66%), however in Muslim group 50% were from urban and 50% from rural background.

Table 3: Mean, SD and t-value of Hindus and Muslims on Religiosity, Social distance and Well-being (N=100)

Dimensions	Hindus (n=50)		Muslims (n=50)		t-value	p-value
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Religiosity	5.54	1.56	7.66	2.00	5.88	**0.00**
Social distance	2.38	1.35	2.22	0.91	0.69	0.49
Well-being	50.76	7.708	53.74	7.782	1.92	**0.05**

df=98

Results revealed that, there is a significant difference, on the dimensions of Religiosity (t=5.88, p=0.00) and Well being (t=1.92, p=0.05) between Hindu and Muslim participants. Muslims were scored higher on religiosity and well-being than Hindu participants. Further, it has been found that there is no significant difference on the dimension of Social distance (t= 0.69, p=0.49) between the two groups. Earlier study on Indian population has reported the same results (Tausch, Hewstone & Roy, 2008).

Table 4: Correlations between Religiosity, Social distance and Well being (N=100).

Dimensions	Religiosity	Social distance	Well-being
Religiosity	1		
Social distance	-0.194	1	
Well-being	**.0.381****	**-0.542****	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (p<0.01)

Correlation analysis showed that there is a significant positive correlation between religiosity and well-being. That means religious commitment positively contributes to the well-being of the participants. Further, it has been found that, there is significant negative correlation between social distance and the well-being of the population. It signifies that, being socially distant from

the other community negatively affect the overall well-being of both the communities. Result also revealed that religiosity and social distance are negatively related but the relationship is not statistically significant. It reveals that, religion is not a significant factor for younger generation while deciding their social relationship with their peer groups.

Table 5: Summary of ANOVA of Multiple regression for dependent variable of well-being (N=100)

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p-value
1	Regression	1791.910	1	1791.910	40.755	.000[a]
	Residual	4308.840	98	43.968		
	Total	6100.750	99			
2	Regression	2274.438	2	1137.219	28.829	.000[b]
	Residual	3826.312	97	39.447		
	Total	6100.750	99			

a. Predictors: Social distance, b. Predictors: Social distance, Religiosity

A multiple regression was run to predict well-being from religiosity and social distance. It has been found that religiosity and social distance both predict well-being significantly. However, social distance has been found to be stronger predictor of well-being than religiosity for the studied population. Social distance accounts for 29.4% of variance in the extent of well-being. However, social distance and religiosity both together account for 37.3% of variance in well-being, that means relative accountability of religiosity is only 7.9%. Hence it signifies that social distance is stronger predictor of well-being than religiosity for the studied population

Table 6: Summary of Multiple regression for dependent variable of well-being (N=100)

Measures	Beta Value	t-value	p-value
Social distance	-3.319	-5.934	.000
Religiosity	1.080	3.497	.001

Dependent variable: WB, Predictors: Social distance, Religiosity, df=99

R^2: 0.294[a], 0.373[b] R^2 change: 0.079

Table 6 shows that, both independent variables are predicting the well-being in the total sample. However, social distance has been found as significant negative predictor, which means, higher social distance between the communities reduces the well-being of its members. Similarly, Religiosity has been found to be a significant positive predictor, which positively contributes to the well-being of the community members.

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study was undertaken to assess the role of religiosity and social distance on the well-being of two religious communities- Hindus and Muslims in India. There are limited studies in India which addressed these issues in context of Hindu and Muslim young adults. Through analyzing the findings of the study we can conclude that, today's younger generation may differ in context of religiosity but their religious believes do not influence their social relationships in workplace. They believe in inter-group contact and cross-cultural friendship. Furthermore, social distance has emerged as a strong predictor of well-being for both of the communities which mean close inter-group relationship between the communities positively contribute to overall well-being of both the communities. In the line of earlier studies religiosity has been found to be positively related with well-being and also predict the same (Diener & Seligman, 2004; Donovan & Halpern, 2002; Helliwell & Putnam, 2005; Williams & Sternthal, 2007)

The present study reveals the importance of social contact in inter-group relationship. Hence it will have a great implication in building cordial relationship between the diverse work groups (especially Hindu and Muslim communities) in the organization. Interventions aimed at reducing social distance between the employees in work setting may be designed to improve the inter-group relationships between them and help them aliening towards the organizational goals. It will not only enhance their performance as team players, but also the overall productivity of the organization.

LIMITATIONS

The study focuses on the inter-group relationship between the Hindu and Muslim communities only; however, other ethnic groups with larger sample size can also be taken for further study to get richer findings about the relationships between the different communities in India.

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