

Role of Religion in the life of Academic Leadership: A Remedy to Stress

Dr. Fakhra ‘Azīzⁱ Dr. Aroona Hāshmiⁱⁱ Dr Ṭāhira Kalsūmⁱⁱⁱ

Abstract

The present descriptive study aimed to investigate the influence of religion on academic leaders' stress and their coping. Population of the study was consisted of heads, directors and deans of recognized universities located in Lahore, Punjab (Pakistan). The data was collected through purposively sample of 167 academic leaders. Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) and the Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (COPE) were used as research instruments. However, the responses were received from 120 out of 167 academic leaders from various universities located in Lahore. The respondents were consisted of both genders where 67 were male and 53 were female. The two more cohorts, based on their age and satisfaction level, were purposively formed. The Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied to measure the differences based on gender, age and satisfaction level. The findings suggest that religion was appeared a significant coping strategy to reduce stress for all academic leaders among others. Further, it was revealed that female academic leaders were more inclined towards their religion than male academic leaders. Intrapersonal religious commitment and interpersonal religious commitment of junior and satisfied academic leaders were found to be higher than senior and dissatisfied ones. It was suggested that future studies should be focused on other variables to investigate the role of religion in the lives of academic leaders like ethnicity, social and economic status, family backgrounds and family.

Key words: Religion, Academic Leaders, Coping strategy, Stress

Introduction

The focus of this descriptive quantitative approach was to investigate the extent to which academic leaders incorporate religion into their lives and use it as a coping strategy for reducing their stress. Religion is a complete set of one's beliefs, feelings, dogmas and practices that describe his/her relations with divinity in Muslims with Allah (SBHT). Belief in a religion has reported

i Associate Professor, Lahore College for women University, Lahore

ii Assistant Professor, IOE, University of the Punjab, Lahore

iii Assistant Professor, Lahore College for women University, Lahore

to be positively associated with peoples coping strategies for stress in their lives. Khalek opined that People with high scores of religiosity also have an increased sense of well-being¹. Merrill reported a constructive impact of religion on positive and negative factors related to students' stress². Mayo (2016) narrated the negative effects of Stress on one's body, mood, and behavior further chronic stress can cause serious health problems. World Health Organization (2006) reported an association between religious coping strategies and decreased pain-related disability and improved mood. Reutter and Bigatti³ seconded it by narrating a beneficial association of religiosity and spirituality with stress and health⁴.

Evidence has also shown that women in leadership positions use religious problem-solving as a way to cope in search for meaning, comfort, and control when faced with problems⁵. It allows them to align their religious and spirituality beliefs with the issue at hand⁶. Due to significance of the religion it is necessary to probe into the lives of academic leadership for investigating their inclination towards religion and their use of it for coping stress.

Literature Review

Each person and profession has specific stressors, Leaders especially academicians experience high levels of work stress⁷. Negative psychological outcomes, such as absenteeism, low job satisfaction, and intention to quit are significantly associated with work stress⁸. More recent research studies on association of religion and leadership has focused on variables such as the extent of religious intensity⁹, and links between religiosity and recognizing unethical problem instead of strength of religious belief and attitudes. This emerging research trend illustrates the value of examining how religion can influence leaders' coping strategies for their effective performance.

Studies have examined the connection between religion and factors related to stress of teachers. Green investigated the effects of religious or spiritual coping strategies on teachers' health issues¹⁰. Bernard conducted a research on the stressors and coping strategies of women in leadership positions and reported that prayer and spirituality appeared throughout the interviews as a means of coping¹¹. Roberts conducted a research on Leadership coping skills. He reported that over³/₄ leaders indicated God or a higher power guides or protects them through increasing hope and stress resiliency. Further he confirmed the positive connotation between servant leader spiritual intelligence (SLWSI) and lower levels of stress and more favorable

organizational attitudes¹². Gallagher derived four main themes from the data for coping with perceived stress. Spiritual activities as a part of leaders regular stress relief regimen was one of them¹³.

Based on this context, the present descriptive study aimed to investigate the influence of religion on academic leaders' stress and their coping

Method

The data was collected purposively from academic leaders appointed in 8 universities of Lahore. The total number of participants in this study was 167 but 120 provided their responses, Male participants 56% and female participants were 44%. Participants age range from 29 to 58 years old. Participants were informed about the purpose and nature of the study and made them assured that information provided by them will be kept confidential.

Research Hypothesis

1. There is no difference between male and female's coping with their stress?
2. There is no difference between senior and junior academic leaders 'level of incorporating religion in their lives.
3. There is no difference between satisfied with their lives and those dissatisfied with their lives level of incorporating religion in their lives?

Research Instruments

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10) developed by Worthington, E. L., Jr., Wade, N. G., Hight, T. L., Ripley, J. S., McCullough, M. E., Berry, J. W., Schmitt, M. M., Berry, J. T., Bursley, K. H., & O'Conner, L (2012) was retrieved from www.midss.ie for data collection. It is consisted of 10 statements for assessing level of one's religious commitment using a 5-point Likert rating scale. It examines intrapersonal religious commitment (six items) and interpersonal commitment (four items) of participants¹⁴.

Second instrument used was The COPE instrument developed by Carver¹⁵. It was developed to measure coping and to identify the different strategies used by people for responding their stress.

Method

Lists of faculty members on position of head, director and dean of the faculties, institutions and departments from registrar offices of respective universities were obtained. Researcher with the help of colleagues got access to them and requested for their responses. The data of all participants were

individually entered into SPSS version 18. Participants were categorized as seniors and juniors as seniors were those whose age was between 29 and 44 and juniors were those whose age was between 45 and 58.

RESULTS

1- There is no difference between male and female’s coping with their stress.

Table 1: Male and female academic leaders’ coping with their stress

		N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mental Disengagement	Male	67	8.59	2.29	1	44.15	7.79	.003
	Female	53	9.98	2.48	119	5.09		
	Total	120	9.31	2.49	120			
Active Coping	Male	67	10.49	2.50	1	29.39	4.64	.015
	Female	53	9.79	2.59	119	5.77		
	Total	120	10.88	2.58	120			
Behavioral Disengagement	Male	67	4.99	2.20	1	15.23	3.81	.022
	Female	53	5.59	2.27	119	4.06		
	Total	120	5.68	2.26	120			
Emotional Social Support	Male	67	8.28	3.56	1	228.15	18.18	.000
	Female	53	10.89	3.39	119	11.411		
	Total	120	9.32	3.53	120			
Focus on & Venting of Emotions	Male	67	7.18	2.67	1	311.70	36.33	.000
	Female	53	9.41	3.00	119	7.499		
	Total	120	8.99	3.01	120			
Religious Coping	Male	67	7.26	4.01	1	143.09	7.80	.002
	Female	53	8.79	4.19	119	16.06		
	Total	120	8.29	4.18	120			

One-way ANOVA was applied to investigate the difference between male and female academic leaders’ scores for mental disengagement, active coping, behavioral disengagement, use of emotional social support, focus on and venting of emotions, and religious coping. Significant differences were found on all sub scales.

Except active coping, on all other remaining subscales males scored lower than females academic leaders. Tukey’s HSD was used to determine the nature of the differences between both genders.

1. There is no difference between senior and junior academic leaders ‘level of incorporating religion in their lives.

Table 2: Senior and junior academic leaders ‘level of incorporating religion in their lives

			N	Mean	Std. Dev	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Intrapersonal Religious Commitment	Senior		89	12.392	5.757	1	223.1	4.50	.031
	Junior		31	14.900	6.730	119	44.3		
	Total		120	13.799	6.968	120			
Interpersonal Religious Commitment	Senior		89	6.989	2.999	1	75.28	4.51	.031
	Junior		31	7.410	4.121	119	16.33		
	Total		120	7.190	4.010	120			

To compare intrapersonal religious commitment and interpersonal religious commitment of senior and junior academic leaders, one-way ANOVA was computed. A significant difference was calculated among intrapersonal religious commitment as $F = 4.50, p < 0.05$. Senior academic leaders scored lower in intrapersonal religious commitment ($m = 12.392, sd = 5.757$) than junior academic leaders ($m = 14.900, sd = 6.730$). A significant difference was also found on interpersonal religious commitment as $F = 4.51, p < 0.05$. It was found that like intrapersonal commitment senior academic leaders scored lower in interpersonal religious commitment ($m = 6.989, sd = 2.999$) than junior academic leaders ($m = 7.410, sd = 4.121$). Nature of difference was determined by applying Tukey’s HSD. Hypothesis 2 was rejected.

2. There is no difference between satisfied with their lives and dissatisfied academic leaders' level of incorporating religion in their lives.

Table 3: Dissatisfied and satisfied academic leaders 'level of incorporating religion in their lives

		N	Mean	Std. Deviat	df	Mean Squar	F	Sig.
Intrapersonal Religious Commitment	Dissatisfied	36	11.901	4.781	1	299.0	5.95	.011
	Satisfied	84	13.951	6.491	119	39.01		
	Total	120	12.945	6.161	120			
Interpersonal Religious Commitment	Dissatisfied	36	6.451	2.599	1	82.78	4.23	.023
	Satisfied	84	7.499	3.498	119	16.30		
	Total	120	7.235	3.311	120			

To compare intrapersonal religious commitment and interpersonal religious commitment of dissatisfied and satisfied academic leaders, one-way ANOVA was computed. A significant difference was found among intrapersonal religious commitment as $F = 5.95, p < 0.05$. Academic leaders with dissatisfied life scored lower ($m=11.901, sd=4.781$) than those satisfied with their lives ($m=13.951, sd=6.491$). Same case was found on interpersonal religious commitment ($F= 4.23, p < 0.05$). It was reported that dissatisfied academic leader scored lower ($m=6.451, sd=2.599$) than those who were satisfied with their lives ($m=7.499, sd=3.498$). Nature of difference was determined by applying Tukey's HSD. Hypothesis 3 was rejected.

Conclusions

The findings suggest that junior academic leaders have a higher intrapersonal religious commitment and a higher interpersonal religious commitment than senior ones. Religious commitment means extent of involvement of someone in his /her religion¹⁶. Intrapersonal states prevailing or

occurring within one's mind where interpersonal describes the relations with others. Therefore junior academic leaders have a higher religious commitment both internally and externally than seniors. The findings reveals satisfied academic leaders scored higher on both intrapersonal and interpersonal religious commitment.

The study findings report several associations between academic leaders' gender and how they cope with stress. The male academic leaders scored higher on active coping than female counterparts. Carver (1989) narrated Active coping as the process of taking steps to remove the stressor that may include direction action or increasing one's efforts. It means male academic leaders report a higher use of active coping skills than females. The results of present study are in line with Qian, Yarnal and Almeida who found similar results where females compared to males experience more severe daily stressors and gender does play an active role in the stress and coping process¹⁷.

The finding also indicates female academic leaders scored higher on religious coping than males. Ano and Vasconcelles described positive religious coping strategies as reaching out to support from religious leadership, seeking God, and working with God on a solution¹⁸. It means female academic leaders use religious coping more than males. Dennis, Muller, Miller and Banergee (2004) also reported gender differences in religious coping of stress although it was found among students. Female students were more inclined towards religion than males.

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