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THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOUS
BEHAVIOUR AND STRESS AMONG MUSLIM SERVICE-
SECTOR WORKERS IN MALAYSIA

BY

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ABSTRACT

This research investigates the relationship between religious behaviour and stress among Muslim service-sector workers in Malaysia. Two instruments were utilized to achieve this objective. First, an Islamic Religious Behaviour Questionnaire (IRBQ) was constructed to measure the religious behaviour of the respondents. It consists of 58 items in four sub-categories: Basics of Islam, 'Aqīdah, Relationship and Nawāfil. Second, a ready-made checklist consisting of 30 items, Stress-Arousal Checklist (SACL) was used to measure the level of stress. One hundred and eighty one respondents were selected through accidental or opportunity sampling from various organizations to respond to the questionnaire. Of them, only 169 completed the questionnaire. The analysis seems to indicate a negative relationship between various religious behaviour (Basics of Islam, 'Aqīdah, Relationship and Nawāfil) and stress. This trend seems to go in line with the previous research findings, which indicate that being religious does decrease stress. However, the present finding does not show a significant relationship. Therefore, the researcher has discussed some limitations leading to this insignificant relationship. The most prevalent ones are the questionable validity of both IRBQ and SACL and the problems faced while translating the SACL into Malay language.

الملخص

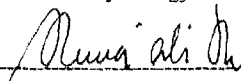
يتحرى هذا البحث كشف العلاقة بين السلوك الديني والضغط النفسي لدى العاملين في قطاع الخدمة الوطنية في ماليزيا. وقد تم استخدام أداتين لتحقيق أهداف البحث وهما:

١. استبيان السلوك الإسلامي الذي تم إعداده لقياس السلوك الديني للعينة ويتكون من (٨٥) بنداً موزعاً على أربعة أقسام: أساسيات الإسلام، العقيدة، العلاقات، والنوافل.
٢. استبيان جاهز لقياس الضغوط النفسية ويحتوي على (٣٠) بنداً عن الضغط النفسي ومثرائه (SACL). استخدم هذه الأداة لقياس مستوى الضغط النفسي لدى أفراد العينة وذلك حسب العلامات التي يضعونها عليه.

تكونت عينة البحث من (١٨١) شخصاً تم اختيارهم عشوائياً أو حسب الفرص المتاحة من عدة مؤسسات في ماليزيا. وكان عدد الذين أجابوا على الاستبيان (١٦٩) شخصاً فقط. وقد أظهرت نتائج البحث أن هناك علاقة سلبية غير دالة بين السلوك الديني (مبادئ الإسلام، العقيدة، العلاقات والنوافل) والضغط النفسي. والجدير بالذكر ان نتيجة هذا البحث متفقة مع نتائج البحوث السابقة التي وجدت بأن التدين يخفف من الضغط النفسي ولكن العلاقة لم تكن دالة في هذه الدراسة. وقد ناقش البحث عدة اسباب يمكن عزو هذه النتيجة إليها. من أهم هذه الاسباب قضية صدق الأداتين استبانة السلوك الديني الإسلامي وقائمة الضغط-الاثارة، وقضية مشكلة ترجمة الاداة الثانية الى اللغة الملايوية.

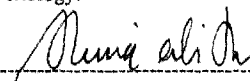
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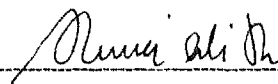
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for
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Examiner
Date: 18/2/2000

This thesis was submitted to the Department of Psychology and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Science in Psychology.



Ashiq Ali Shah
Head, Department of Psychology
Date: 18/2/2000

This thesis was submitted to the Kuliyyah of Islamic Revealed Knowledge and Human Sciences and is accepted as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Human Science in Psychology.



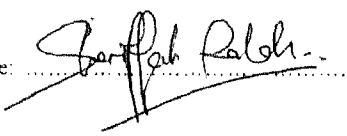
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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by proper citations giving explicit references and a bibliography is appended.

Name: Shariffah Rahah bt Sheik Dawood

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Shariffah Rahah', written over a dotted line. The signature is stylized and includes a long horizontal stroke underneath.

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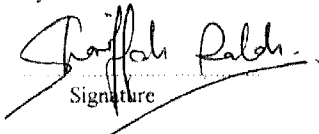
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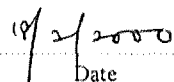
The relationship between religious behaviour and stress among Muslim service-sector workers in Malaysia.

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To my beloved Papa and Ma

My siblings Nor Jan, Rafi and Nasir

I Thank Allah (SWT) for giving me the Most Precious Gift—My Family

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
Abstract.....	ii
Abstract (Arabic).....	iii
Approval Page.....	iv
Declaration.....	v
Dedication.....	vii
Acknowledgments.....	viii
List of Tables.....	xi
Figure Captions.....	xii
Chapter 1	
A Framework for Analysis.....	1
Justifications.....	4
Main Objective.....	5
Theoretical Frame.....	5
Religion.....	5
Measuring religious behaviour.....	7
Stress.....	8
Definitions.....	9
Religion.....	9
Religious behaviour.....	10
Stress.....	10
Operational Definitions.....	11
Hypothesis.....	11
Chapter 2	
Review of Literature.....	12
Religious mechanisms against stress.....	12
Relationship between religion and stress.....	14
Among general population.....	14
Among older adults and adolescents.....	17
Among different races.....	18
Conflicting findings on the relationship between religion and stress.....	18
Why emphasize stress?.....	20
Chapter 3	
Methodology.....	22
The need for a new religious behaviour scale.....	22
The religious behaviour scale at the University of Kuwait.....	24
Stress-arousal checklist.....	25
Population.....	27
Pilot study.....	26
Sample.....	27
Instruments.....	27
A. Test construction: IRBQ.....	27

Islam (<i>Shariah</i>): <i>Ibadat, Nawāfil and Mu'amalāt</i>	27
<i>Aqīdah</i>	31
Face validity the instrument (IRBQ).....	34
B. Stress-Arousal Checklist (SACL).....	35
Procedure.....	35
Results of the pilot study.....	36
Reliability.....	37
Item-analysis.....	37
Main Study	38
Sample.....	38
Instruments.....	43
A. Islamic Religious Behaviour Questionnaire (IRBQ).....	43
B. Stress-Arousal Checklist (SACL).....	43
Translation of instruments.....	43
A. IRBQ.....	43
B. SACL.....	44
Procedure.....	45
Analysis of the data.....	46
Chapter 4	
Results and Discussion	47
Conclusion.....	51
Discussion and limitations of the findings.....	52
References	58
Appendices	63
Appendix A.....	63
Appendix B.....	65
Appendix C.....	69
Appendix D.....	72
Appendix E.....	79

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1. Pearson-Product Moment correlation between the whole test (IRBQ) and each sub-category of Islamic religious behaviour in the pilotstudy.....	36
Table 2. Positive and negative items in the revised version of the IRBQ.....	37
Table 3. Descriptive statistics of Islamic Religious Behaviour, it's four sub-tests (Bascis, 'Aqīdah, Relationship and Nawāfil) and stress in the main study.....	48
Table 4. The result of Pearson-Product Moment correlation between Islamic religious Behaviour (and each dimension) and stress in the main study.....	51

FIGURE CAPTIONS

Figure 1.	Age of respondents.....	39
Figure 2.	Gender of respondents.....	39
Figure 3.	Level of education.....	40
Figure 4.	Marital status.....	40
Figure 5.	Number of children.....	41
Figure 6.	Types of jobs.....	41
Figure 7.	Years of working experience.....	42
Figure 8.	Monthly income.....	42
Figure 9.	Frequency distribution curve of Islamic Religious Behaviour as a whole.....	49
Figure 10.	Frequency distribution curve of stress.....	50

CHAPTER 1

A FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS

The second half of the 20th century saw a rapid decline in the study of religion among psychologists (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996). Behaviourists were indifferent to the study of religion while psychoanalysts degraded it to the level of psychopathology. According to Goldman (1964), there were two reasons why religion was not an easy topic for psychological testing. First, it was presumed that religion was not measurable in a statistically quantitative manner according to the demands of research. Second, it was feared that psychology would be used to discredit the validity of religious belief. According to Siegman (1961), Freud suggested that man invented God when he found himself overwhelmed by life's frustrations and difficulties. As a result, the individual went into regression, whereby he began to wish that he were a child again so that he could seek the help of his powerful father (an omnipotent God). Freud also suggested that apart from being a source of help, a father was also seen as a fear-inducing figure as a result of the castration complex. Therefore, God is both loved and feared. Freud characterised religion as a projection of infantile needs and, therefore, an illusion (Siegman, 1961). Consequently, many psychologists since Freud have viewed religious beliefs and practices as signs of psychological disorder. Bergin (1983) added that the issue also pertained to the frame of reference of human sciences and scientists. According to him, the main assumptions of the dominant theories of personality and psychopathology are naturalistic and humanistic rather than theistic and spiritual. Therefore, the non-religious bias of most of the literature in psychology was based on

ideological choices that had become dominant through professional usage. Since professionals were less involved in religion than most people, they underestimated the significance of religion in people's lives. Finally, the conceptual and attitudinal biases had become so much a part of empirical work that religious factors were either excluded from measurement or were included in such a way as to prejudice the results.

The mid-1950's saw a renaissance in the study of religion and an empirical psychology of religion emerged (Hood et al., 1996). Psychologists were concerned with the empirical conditions of religious phenomena only, which dealt with overt religious behaviour. This was further supported by (Goldman, 1964; Jung, 1969) and the more recent psychologists such as (Hood et al., 1996; Koenig, 1997). In addition, many psychologists have now realized the importance of religion and have adopted a more positive attitude towards it. The impact of religious beliefs and religious institutions on individual and social life is great and, in fact, religion in one form or another is found in almost every culture (Paloutzian & Kirkpartick, 1995). The consequences of religious commitment have been extensively investigated in the sociological study of religion. Most of this research focused on the impact of religious commitment on morality, social organization, secular attitudes and behaviour. However, more recently the effects of religion on personal health and psychological well-being have received considerable attention (Ferraro & Albrecht-Jensen, 1991; Petersen & Roy, 1985). Thus, Western psychology has already started to feel the necessity of faith and the spiritual element in life in developing a happy, relaxed and normal person. This can be seen in the increasing volume and quality of research in this field. In order to accommodate the tremendous growth of literature in

the area of religion and mental health and illness, the National Institute of Mental Health had printed a separate bibliography on the topic (Payne, Bergin, Bielema, & Jenkins, 1991).

However, it should be strictly noted that the majority of the studies have been conducted mainly in countries where the Judeo-Christian religion was predominant (Koenig, 1997). Therefore, any generalization can only be made to people with this particular background. Research in this area is very scarce in Muslim nations. This indicates that they are still way behind in a very crucial area of study. Furthermore, the majority of religiosity scales available in the literature have been developed for use by Christian subjects (Wulff, 1997). Thus, this present study will be one of the pioneering studies conducted in a small Muslim country like Malaysia. The researcher will develop of a new religious behaviour questionnaire based on Islamic perspectives for use by Muslim subjects especially in Malaysia. Previous studies on religion have widely examined its relationship with some major aspects of mental health like suicide, delinquency, depression, mortality, alcohol use, drug use and physical health. Therefore, this present research has opted to investigate the relationship between religion and stress in particular since it is one of the important mental health variables. Previous research seems to indicate that stress is an important phenomenon since it plays an important role in the onset and course of a variety of psychological problems and illnesses (Herbert, 1997; Neufield, 1989; Wulff, 1997). The population of interest in this research has been narrowed down to include only service-sector workers instead of the general population or any other group. The working population of a particular country plays an important role in determining the economic stability of the nation. Since the majority of the previous research has

examined other sub-groups such as adolescents, elderly and certain races, the present research has chosen to focus on service-sector workers who are just as important. It is hoped that this study will encourage other researchers to further investigate the subject matter of the relation between religion and psychological disorders in general and stress in particular among Muslim workers.

Justifications

- 1- This research will focus on Muslim subjects from a Muslim country an area which lacks much research since the majority of the studies have been conducted on Judeo-Christian subjects in Western countries.
- 2- Since the majority of the studies conducted were based on a Judeo-Christian framework, this research will focus on an Islamic framework for comparative purposes.
- 3- This research will construct an Islamic religious behaviour scale in order to assess the religiosity of the subjects. This scale is essential because the scales developed by the Western researchers are based on Judaism and Christianity and therefore, these scales are not suitable for utilization in this research.
- 4- Since most of the researches measured various aspects of mental health in general, this research will focus only on stress in general and its relationship with Islamic religious behaviour in specific.
- 5- The population of interest in this research is the Muslim service-sector workers in Klang Valley, Malaysia. The results are likely to benefit the service-sector workers.

Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to find out the relationship between religious behaviour and stress among Muslim service-sector workers in Klang Valley, Malaysia. To achieve this objective, the researcher will construct a measure of Islamic religious behaviour (IRBQ) and relate it to a ready-made stress test (SACL).

Theoretical framework

Religion

Can there be a common definition of religion? Paloutzian and Kirkpatrick (1995) stated that religion cannot be defined simply in terms of a specific set of beliefs or a particular institution or a particular set of behaviours since different authors focus on different facets of a phenomenon. According to Guthrie (1996), religion is a concept which evolves from a particular culture at a particular time. Furthermore, the history of definitions of religion makes it almost impossible since any definition of religion is likely to be satisfactory only to its author (Hood et al., 1996). Poloutzian (1996) holds that there has not been much benefit to adhere to one strict definition of religion in psychological research because such efforts do not seem to have pushed scientific research forward. There seems to be a consensus that diversity should be encouraged rather than attempting to standardize a single definition of religion.

In addition, Hood et al. (1996) suggested that operational definitions be utilized to avoid “the pitfalls of unproductive, far-ranging, grand-theoretical, general definitions of religion” (p. 4). By using this scientific method, psychologists do not continually try to define religion until they are satisfied before they conduct research upon it. Rather they conduct their studies using the most precise methods available at

the time for measuring and manipulating the religious variables they are trying to study (Paloutzian, 1996). Operational definitions in the psychology of religion usually refer to some tangible religious indicator. For example, church attendance, church membership, answers to questions about the importance of religion in one's life, statements dealing with the details of religious beliefs, descriptions of the nature of a religious experience and intrinsic/extrinsic religious orientations (Hood et al., 1996; Petersen & Roy, 1985). It is also agreed that these specific measures of religiosity such as intrinsic/extrinsic orientation, level of commitment or activity level provide more informative ideas than denominational affiliation. Many studies used to ask for denominational affiliation of the respondents (e.g., Protestant, Catholic or Jewish). However, denomination is currently considered a weak and ineffective measure of religiosity since it neglects the diverse range of religious styles and practices within such broad categories (Koenig, 1997; Larson & Larson, 1991). Therefore, denominational affiliation is a rougher estimate of religion and it explains only a little about a person's way of being religious (Payne, Bergin, Bielema, & Jenkins, 1991). In addition, Larson and Larson (1991) maintained that when religion was studied in terms of denomination it demonstrated few clinical effects compared to when studied with measures designed to assess the depth of a person's faith.

To date, most psychological research in religion have been conducted within the Judeo-Christian framework (Koenig, 1997). This indicates that the operational definitions of religion are solely based upon the Judeo-Christian framework. The Western definition of religion is completely different from the Islamic perspective due to their religious behaviour, cultural and social differences. Therefore, for the purpose

of this study the researcher will have to operationally define religion based on the Islamic perspective (it will be stated in this chapter later).

Measuring religious behaviour

Other contemporary psychologists such as Wulff (1997), seems to agree with Hood et al. (1996) that the most important task of the psychologist of religion is to develop precise and reliable means to empirically assess individual piety. When psychologists first began research in this area, they simply constructed measures of religiousness or religiosity. However, extensive research has shown that there are many dimensions of religiosity (Hood et al., 1996). This view is further supported by Hallahmi and Argyle (1997). According to them, being religious involves several discrete kinds of behaviour, which are measurable as dimensions. Hallahmi and Argyle (1997) further cited four dimensions as suggested by Glock: ideology (religious beliefs), religious knowledge, rituals and intense religious experience. In addition, Hood et al. (1996) strongly recommended a multidimensional system advanced by Verbit. The proposed components are as follows:

- rituals - private and public ceremonial behaviour
- doctrine - affirmations about the relationship of the individual to the ultimate
- emotions - the presence of feelings
- ethics - rules for the guidance of interpersonal behaviour, connoting right and wrong, good and bad
- community - involvement in a community of the faithful, psychologically, socially and physically

The above frameworks are several famous examples which had been suggested by the contemporary psychologists. However, no one has founded the fundamental

dimensions of religiousness (Guthrie, 1996; Wulff, 1997) and therefore, scales of any kind should be understood as conventional devices that serve the particular needs of the researcher.

Stress

There have been various theoretical perspectives relating to stress. The stimulus-based or engineering approach treats stress as a stimulus characteristic of the person's environment. The stimulus refers to the load or level of demand placed on the person or some aversive element of the environment (Cox & Ferguson, 1991). The response-based or medico-physiological approach treats stress as a response to aversive or noxious environmental stimuli. Its roots can be traced back to Hans Selye who proposed the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) and defined stress as the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it (Hurrell, 1981). Although, the work of Hans Selye is generally considered the first major discussion of stress, this model has been challenged by researchers on two grounds (Ross & Altmaier, 1994). Selye's argument that every response to stress by each individual follows the alarm, resistance and exhaustion pattern is difficult to accept. Actually, the body's response to stress can vary depending on the stressor. In addition, this model also proposes the same response for each stressor, whether external or internal in nature. However, a stressor may create a different response from other stressors. Therefore, the engineering approach and the medico-physiological approach are considered too narrow and only focus on the physical approach to stress.

One of the most famous psychological approaches to stress is the transactional model (Cox & Ferguson, 1991). According to this model stress was described as the psychological and physiological state which arose when there was a significant

imbalance between the person's perception of the demands on them and their ability to cope with those demands. The researcher will utilize this particular model for the present research. This approach is more applicable because it includes both physical and psychological aspects of stress.

Definitions

Religion

"The religion in the eyes of God is Islam" (*Sūrah al-'Imrān*: 19).

Hadīth Bukhārī, ii, 37 (*Hadīth* of Gabriel) has explained the meaning of Islam clearly.

On the authority of Sayyidina Umar, who said:

One day while we were sitting with the Messenger of Allah (may the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) there appeared before us a man whose clothes were exceedingly white and whose hair was exceedingly black; no signs of journeying were to be seen on him and none of us knew him. He walked towards us and sat down by the Prophet (peace be upon him). Resting his knees against his and placing the palms of his hands on his thighs, he said: "O Muhammad, tell me about Islam." The Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) said: "Islam is to testify that there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah, to perform the prayers, to pay the *zakāh*, to fast in *Ramadān* and to make the pilgrimage to the House if you are able to do so." He said: "You have spoken rightly", and we were amazed at him asking him and saying that he had spoken rightly. He said: "Then tell me about *imān*." He said: "It is to believe in Allah, His angels, His books, His messengers, and the Last Day, and to believe in divine destiny, both the good and the evil thereof." He said: "You have spoken rightly." He said: "Then tell me about *Ihsān*." He said: "It is to worship Allah as though you are seeing Him, and while you see Him not yet truly He sees you." He said: "Then tell me about the Hour." He said: "The one questioned about it knows no better than the questioner." He said: "Then tell me about its signs." He said: "That the slave-girl will give birth to her mistress and that you will see the barefooted, naked, destitute herdsmen competing in constructing lofty buildings." Then he took himself off and I stayed for a time. Then he said "O Umar, do you know who the questioner was?" I said, "Allah and His Messenger know best." He said: "It was Gabriel, who came to you to teach you your religion." (Related by Muslim)

Therefore based on this *Ḥadīth* most of our scholars have structurally divided Islam into three categories: Islam, *Imān* and *Iḥsān* (Ahmad, 1974).

Religious behaviour

The present research includes four categories of Islamic religious behaviour:

- *'Ibadāt* (basics of Islam) stands for the five pillars of Islam which are: to testify that there is no God but Allah (SWT) and that Muhammad (SAW) is the Messenger of Allah, to establish prayer, to pay *zakāh*, to observe fasting in the month of *Ramadān* and to perform pilgrimage to the Holy *Kaaba*.
- *Nāfilah* stands for supererogatory work.
- *Mu'amalāt* is the relationship of Muslims with themselves, family, relatives, other Muslims and humankind.
- *'Aqīdah (Imān)* consists of six pillars of *Imān*.

Certain dimensions like *'Aqīdah* which consist of the six pillars of *imān* (belief in Allah, His angels, His books as completed by *Qurān*, His messengers, the Day of Final Judgement and *Qadā'* and *Qadar*) will be difficult to measure directly. Therefore, certain behavioural measures will be used to assess them indirectly.

Stress

This is a psychological and physiological state which arose when there was a significant imbalance between the person's perception of the demands on them and their ability to cope with those demands (Cox & Ferguson, 1991).

Operational definitions

- Islamic religious behaviour is measured by a questionnaire indicating the level of *'Ibādah, Nāfilah, Mu'amalāt* and *'Aqīdah* of respondents.
- Stress is measured by a stress-arousal checklist, which measures the psychological and physiological state of the respondents.

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses has been tested:

There is a relationship between religious behaviour and stress among service-sector workers in Klang-Valley, Malaysia.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Religious mechanisms against stress

Ellison (1991) and Idler (1987) tried to identify the mechanisms through which religion appears to influence personal and community well-being. First, involvement in religious groups may be a source of social support. It seems that churches and synagogues provide opportunities for regular interaction and formation of friendships among churchgoers. Apart from the formal channel, members also support one another informally, through tangible aid (e.g., goods and services), socioemotional support (e.g., companionship and comfort) and spiritual support. Second, religiosity activates a special meaning system to make sense of life and cope with their experience. According to Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (1998), there is now compelling evidence that religious cognitions and behaviors are valuable coping resources for many individuals, especially for people dealing with certain types of stressors like loss events (bereavements), unexpected calamities (serious accidents) and health problems (chronic pain and long-term disabilities). Third, divine interaction may enhance individual self-esteem and self-efficacy. People may gain a sense of self worth by developing an ongoing personal relationship with a perceived divine other who is believed to give each person unconditional love and care and can be engaged interactively in a quest for solace and guidance (Ellison, 1998). This theodicy mechanism allows religiously-involved people to accept that suffering may exist and to deal more effectively with problems. Finally, most religious communities have teachings that discourage risk-taking and deviant behaviors, provide moral