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Article:	Attitudes toward Feminism in a Patriarchal Muslim Country: The Impact of Religiosity, Background, Gender, Education, and Sect
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ABSTRACT

This study intends to investigate the attitudes toward feminism in a patriarchal Muslim country. The study explores the influence of religiosity, background, gender, education, and sect. The study used a cross-sectional research design vis-à-vis survey method. A survey questionnaire with demographic variables was administered to three religious seminaries and two university students in Lahore to collect data. The sample for the study consisted of 340 respondents. It was found that university and religious seminary students differed regarding their attitudes towards feminism with females being more feminist compared to males. Moreover, background also played a significant role toward feminism. Religious sect also played a significant role regarding the attitudes of students towards feminism. However, age was found to have no influence on the attitudes towards feminism. These findings have implications for creating a harmonious society vis-à-vis implementation of diverse curriculum.

Keywords: Attitudes, Feminism, Patriarchal, Muslim, Country, Religiosity, Sect

Introduction:

Public opinion is based on the assumption that individuals' beliefs, opinions, and attitudes are instinctive characteristics (Iyengar, 1990). According to this dispositional view of opinion formation, opinions are assumed to be innate to individuals and exhibit stability and consistency (Achen, 1975; Zaller and Feldman, 1988; Zaller, 1992). In contrast, we live in media-saturated societies (Okocha et al., 2023; Yousaf, 2023). Therefore, contextual factors are equally relevant for the formation of public opinion. This view posits that the way the opinion objects are presented has a powerful effect on public opinion (Iyengar, 1990; Yousaf, 2018; Yousaf et al., 2022). This study follows the former argument that public opinion about issues is stable and persists over a period of time. The recent revitalization of the women's movement has stimulated interest in research on attitudes towards feminism. Feminism intends to expose the structure and conditions that contribute to gender inequality and empower women with a voice to speak about their issues from their perspectives (Sarantakos, 2005, 2012). It intends to expose the structures and conditions that contribute to gender inequality and empower women with a voice to speak about their issues from their perspectives (Sarantakos, 2005, 2012). Previous research focused on the dimensions of feminism such as equal political rights (Tilly & Gurin, 1990), economic independence (McLaren et al., 2008), social rights for women (Ahmed, 2009; Hernandez-Truyol, 1995), and media portrayal of the Muslim women as oppressed victims of the “repressive” laws of Islam rather than highlighting the work done by the Muslim women for their emancipation within the context of Islam (Jiwani, 2005; Rahman, 2012).

Moreover, Ali et al. (2008) note that most Muslim women recognize that Islam supports feminism, and hence they identify themselves as more feminist than Christian women. Furthermore, research conducted in the United States on comparing the perception of feminism between college students and their adult relatives discloses that adult relatives were more conservative than college students in their attitude toward feminism, religiosity, and political orientation (Bettencourt et al., 2011). Another exciting research on the impact of religion and spirituality on feminist lives revealed that feminists in the United Kingdom are not much based on the church, and most of them rationally believe in religion and emphasize practice (Aune, 2015). However, Mir-Hosseini (2006) argues that the patriarchal system manipulated the Shria and made laws that were not favorable for Muslim women. Notably, most of the previous research is conducted from the private and public sector's perspective; religious seminaries are the neglected area of study.

Likewise, little research has explored the comparison of attitudes towards feminism among university and religious seminary students and the impact of background factors such as religiosity, their sect, rural and urban backgrounds, education, and gender of the respondents. Therefore, this study is an attempt to contribute to our understanding of the attitudes of Pakistani youth studying in university and religious seminaries towards feminism. This research helps identify a gap in the thinking of university and religious seminary students towards feminism. It suggests policy guidelines to bridge this gap to create a more harmonious society.

Review of Literature

Feminism, Patriarchy, and Women's Suffrage

Feminism is a set of beliefs providing equality between men and women in all aspects of life, such as arts, intellectual pursuits, family, work, politics, sports, and authority relations (Neuman, 2014). It is fundamentally a movement (McBride & Mazur, 2008). The term feminism was first used in 1871 in a medical book to explain the cessation in the development of sexual organs in male patients who were suffering from the feminization of their bodies (Maynes, 1995). The feminist movement is a relatively recent phenomenon (Fisher, 2000). Disagreement among researchers still exists about the word feminist and its origin in history (Olson et al., 2008). Feminism has been categorized into three waves that reflect “the sociohistorical context in which it existed or exists” (Olson et al., 2008, p. 109).

The first wave of feminism started in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century with a critical concern for women's suffrage (political rights), better working conditions, right to education, and equal rights (Freedman, 2001). The second wave began in the 1960s and continued into the 90s. The agenda was to raise consciousness about patriarchy, gender as a social construct, employment rights, and the sexual liberation of women (Wrye, 2009).

The second wave evolved into the third-wave feminism, during the 1990s (Olson et al., 2008). To be more precise, women's liberation is not just for political causes; instead, it provides a chance for women to explore and mobilize their human potential (Micossi, 1970). Hence, it is a diverse and multi-layered phenomenon of actions (Du Bois, 1979; Enyew & Mihrete, 2018; Freedman, 2001) that is concerned with the inferior and discriminant position of women in society due to their biological sexual orientation (Freedman, 2001). The research on feminism resulted in the formation of Feminist theory during the 1970s, and it continuously and constantly is evolving. To put it differently, it is evolving just as the movement adapts with different generations (Garry & Pearsall, 1996).

In contemporary society, feminists are sometimes professed to challenge natural differences between men and women (Freedman, 2001). In this regard, Hooks (2000) noted that feminism is not about hating men; instead, it is a movement to end sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression (Anderson et al., 2009). In the academic world, feminism is still facing controversy and sometimes even evokes fear in the general public (Korman, 1983; Offen, 1988). Sometimes, it is branded as a negative phenomenon (Meijs et al., 2019) because feminists are considered aggressive (Houvouras & Scott Carter, 2008), assertive, and career-oriented (Fowler & Van de Riet, 1972; Harrold, 2014). Despite the aforementioned factors, this movement made a significant contribution to liberating and empowering women (Bellafante, 1998).

Background, Gender, Education, and Attitudes towards feminism

The attitudes towards feminism are not a new phenomenon. The research shows that the majority of females support feminism and its goals but do not want to label themselves as feminists due to a negative perception of being a feminist in society (Ramsey et al., 2007; Twenge & Zucker, 1999). Content analysis showed the arrogant perception of white feminism to neglect women of color and their work while having a loving perception towards women of their color (Ortega, 2006). Likewise, it is found that both males and females perceive feminists as unattractive (Goldberg et al., 1975), whereas attractive females show themselves as less

feminist in orientation (Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). By contrast, Rudman and Fairchild (2007) noted no incompatibility between feminism, beauty, and romance. A study conducted in US found an implicit negativity bias and masculinity bias towards feminists (Jenen et al., 2009). Moreover, Aronson (2003) found supportive perceptions of young females toward feminist goals, coupled with ambiguity about the concept of feminism. Regarding the feminist identity, Williams & Wittig (1997) noted that college women were more willing than college men to identify themselves as feminists. Moreover, Bay-Cheng and Zucker (2007) examined the elicited perception of boys and girls towards the sex-stereotyped portrayal of women in media. Their findings showed that female students showed more agreement with the stereotypical representation of women in the media as sex objects than males. In a similar study conducted in rural Bangladesh, Karim et al. (2018) revealed that men fear losing authority if females participate in developmental initiatives. Women have made a significant contribution to Pakistani society since the very beginning in all aspects of life (Ali et al., 2011). However, the status of women is not homogeneous (Bari & Pal, 2000) in society based on gender (Zarar et al., 2017), class (O'Connor, 1993), rural/urban division, uneven socioeconomic development (Zarar et al., 2017). It is observed that contemporary Pakistani society is more diverse, complex, nuanced, and mutable for feminism (Zubair & Zubair, 2017). It is essential to mention that Pakistan is divided into different educational systems (Lynd, 2007). In addition, the division is also diverse, like rural/urban, private/public/ education and English/Urdu speaking divisions. Every stratum of the educational system in Pakistan has a different curriculum, which means students from diverse educational backgrounds have different approaches to life. An attitude is an evaluation of an attitude object. Therefore, contextual factors such as gender, education, and rural and urban background affect attitudes towards feminism.

Feminism and Islam: The effect of Religious orientation attitudes on Feminism

The concept of feminism is susceptible in Islamic societies. The term *Islamic feminism* began to echo in the 1990s in different parts of the world. This term was first used by various Islamic writers like “Iranian scholar Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Saudi scholar Mai Yamani, South African activist Shamima Sheikh” and many more (Tønnessen, 2014). In contemporary times, Islamic feminism has come to light as a challenge to the patriarchy (Ahmad, 2015). A study shows that certain aspects (divorce and inheritance) of Islamic feminism are less discriminatory than in other religions in Sudan (Roald & Tønnessen, 2007). Thus, Islamic feminists accept the importance of gender equality, but they reject the idea of feminism entirely based on secularism (Tønnessen, 2014).

Many Muslim feminists strongly oppose women's rights given by liberal secular worldviews, especially CEDAW (Pruzan-Jørgensen, 2012). Another similar study concludes that Islamic feminism is battling on two fronts: against Western feminism, which interprets Islam as an oppressive religion, and against the Muslim communities, which accuse them of Westernizing. Thus, Muslim women strive for space to exist and work for gender equality and development between these two extremes (Asal, 2019). Another study explores polarization among feminists that causes the lack of cooperation among women activists. It is the essential factor behind a lack of legislative accomplishment favoring women (Tønnessen & Al-Nagar, 2013). It is noted that Islamic feminism can only work as a component of a more significant movement for gender equality if it coordinates with secular feminism and other women groups striving for equality (Tohidi, 2017). This paper, therefore, intends to explore the perception of

university students and Islamic seminary students toward feminism. Keeping in view this literature, these are two research questions.

Research Questions:

RQ1: To what extent do university and religious seminary students' attitudes toward feminism differ?

RQ2: Whether demographic variables such as gender, education, background, and sect influence attitudes towards feminism?

Research Design

We used a cross-sectional research design to investigate university and religious seminary students' attitudes toward feminism in a patriarchal Muslim country. We used survey method to collect data. Two samples were purposively chosen from three religious seminaries and two universities located in Lahore, Punjab-Pakistan. The reason for selecting purposive sampling was that the religious seminaries did not allow data to be collected from the students studying in the seminaries due to the sensitivity of feminism. Therefore, keeping this problem in view, the first author of this study personally contacted five religious seminaries for data collection. Of the five seminaries, three allowed collecting data from the students.

Instrumentation

We developed a questionnaire partially based on information from the literature on the indicators of feminism. The questionnaire consisted of 12 items. For pilot testing of this instrument, we administered this scale to 12 post-graduate students before collecting data. We calculated the reliability for this piloted data, which was .76. We removed item number four, which had .79 reliability, to improve the overall reliability of the instrument. For the final sample, the reliability was .79, suggesting outstanding internal consistency among the items.

Participants

A survey questionnaire with demographic variables was administered to three religious seminaries and two university students in Lahore to collect data. The survey was bilingual, both in Urdu and English language. Three hundred forty respondents filled out and returned the questionnaires. Of the total 340 samples, 143 were male, and 197 were female. One hundred-seven had a rural background, while 230 reported urban locations. Three respondents should have disclosed their background. Two hundred forty-nine belonged to the lower education category, and 91 registered for higher education. Three hundred sixteen reported their age, which ranged from 16-36 years ($M= 21.04$, $SD= 2.69$). Twenty-four respondents among 340 did not disclose their age. Three hundred twenty-five respondents reported their religious affiliation. Among 231 who belonged to the Sunni sect, 11 to Shia, 30 to alhle-hadeess, 53 did not belong to any religious sect, and 15 respondents declined to reveal their religious affiliation.

Religious Seminaries Students' Sample

The religious seminary students' sample consisted of 145 respondents, comprising 57 male and 88 female students. The age of the respondents ranged from 16 to 36 years ($M= 20.57$, $SD= 2.83$). One hundred and twenty-six students have lower education, whereas 19 have higher education. Fifty-nine students came from rural areas, and 95 were from urban backgrounds. Regarding religious affiliation, 89 were Sunni, 1 was Shia, 17 were alhle-hadeess, and 26 reported that they do not belong to any religious sect. On the other hand, the

university sample comprised 195 students, 86 males and 109 females enrolled in the communication program.

University students Sample

The age of the respondents ranged from 17 to 37 years ($M= 21.41$, $SD= 2.54$). One hundred and twenty-three students have lower education, whereas 72 have higher education. Fifty-eight students came from rural areas, and 135 were from urban backgrounds. Regarding religious affiliation, 142 were Sunni, 10 were Shia, 13 were ahle-hadeess, and 27 reported that they do not belong to any religious sect.

Results

The researchers used an Independent samples t-test and one-way analysis of variance (one-way ANOVA) to answer the research questions. The independent samples t-test was conducted to compare the attitudes toward feminism between the university and religious seminary students; there was a significant difference between university students ($M=48.83$, $SD=9.21$) and religious seminary students ($M=43.18$, $SD=6.81$; $t(322.8) = 6.63$, $p = .005$, two-tailed). The magnitude of the difference in means was large ($\eta^2=0.12$). This means 12 % of the variance is caused by the dependent variable, i.e., attitude towards feminism is explained by the type of institution. This is quite a good variance explained by the type of institution. In a similar vein, the independent samples t-test to compare attitudes toward feminism between genders shows that female students have more attitudes toward feminism score ($M=48.23$, $SD=8.89$) than male students ($M=43.87$, $SD=7.26$, $t(325) = -4.69$, $p=.005$, two-tailed). The effect size was moderate ($\eta^2=0.06$). This illuminates that 6.3 % of the variance caused in the dependent variable, i.e., attitude towards feminism, is explained by gender. This is a remarkable variance in social sciences explained by gender. However, when we conducted an independent samples t-test to compare the attitudes of rural and urban students toward feminism. There was no statistically significant difference in students' attitudes towards feminism between rural ($M=45.61$, $SD=6.74$) compared to urban students ($M=46.86$, $SD=9.25$, $t(322) = -1.23$, $p=.221$, two-tailed). Similarly, an independent samples t-test was used to compare the students' mean attitude scores among lower and higher education category students. There was no statistically significant difference between lower education ($M=46.48$, $SD=8.83$) and higher education category students ($M=46.37$, $SD=7.66$, $t(325) = -.10$, $p=.917$, two-tailed).

In addition, an independent samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between younger ($M=46.68$, $SD=9.38$) and older students ($M=46.81$, $SD=7.36$, $t(302) = -.05$, $p=.96$, two-tailed). Among religious seminaries' students, females were found to have more attitude toward feminism ($M=45.71$, $SD=5.52$) compared to males ($M=39.02$, $SD=4.83$, $t(136) = -.72$, $p < .001$, two-tailed). Likewise, urban residents believed more in feminism ($M=44.17$, $SD=6.59$) than those living in rural settings ($M=41.35$, $SD=4.82$, $t(135) = -.26$, $p=.01$, two-tailed). Similarly, an independent samples t-test showed a statistically significant difference between lower education ($M=43.47$, $SD=6.47$) and higher education students ($M=41.27$, $SD=3.17$, $t(42.4) = 2.3$, $p=.02$, two-tailed). Moreover, a one-way ANOVA was used to explore the impact of religious orientation (sect) on feminism. Participants were divided into four groups vis-à-vis religious sects (Group 1=Sunni; Group 2=Shia; Group 3=ahle-hadeess; Group 4=don't believe in sect). There was a statistically significant difference at .007 level feminism scores for four groups: $F(2, 123) = 4.2$, $p=.007$. The effect size was moderate (Cohen, 1988,

pp. 284-297), it was 09. This explains that the sect of the respondents explains 9.9 percent of the variance in feminism. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test indicated that the mean score for Group 1 ($M=42.41$, $SD=6.56$) was significantly different from Group 4 ($M=47.26$, $SD=6.36$) and Group 2 ($M=40.00$, $SD=2.00$) did not differ significantly from either Group 2 or 3. However, an independent sample t-test between younger ($M=43.70$, $SD=6.86$) and old students did not show a statistically significant difference ($M=41.78$, $SD=4.81$, $t(107.6) = 1.8$, $p=.06$, two-tailed). On the other hand, in an independent samples t-test among university students, females had higher feminism scores ($M=50.27$, $SD=10.46$) compared to males ($M=46.95$, $SD=6.87$, $t(187) = -2.5$, $p=.01$, two-tailed).

Conversely, students belonging to urban did not significantly differ in feminism scores ($M=48.73$, $SD=10.34$) from those living in rural settings ($M=49.11$, $SD=6.05$, $t(167.5) = -.32$, $p=.75$, two-tailed). Similarly, lower education ($M=49.48$, $SD=9.83$) and higher education students did not differ significantly in their feminism scores ($M=47.70$, $SD=7.94$, $t(187) = 1.3$, $p=.2$, two-tailed). Likewise, an independent sample t-test between younger ($M=51.01$, $SD=10.77$) and old students did not show a statistically significant difference ($M=48.87$, $SD=7.24$, $t(169) = 1.5$, $p=.12$, two-tailed).

Discussion

This study explored the impact of religiosity, background, gender, education, and sect on attitudes toward feminism in a patriarchal Muslim country. The findings indicate that university students and religious seminary students differ in terms of their attitudes toward feminism. Our findings indicate that the university students are found to be more feministic compared to religious seminary students. These findings answer the first research question. In Q1, we asked whether university students or religious seminary students are more feministic.

To investigate the influence of demographic variables such as gender, education, background, and sect influence attitudes towards feminism, we found that female students have more attitudes toward feminism than male students. The difference was moderate ($\eta^2=0.06$). Among religious seminaries' students, females were found to have more attitude toward feminism compared to males. In simpler language, men do not believe in equality between men and women. In contrast, the students with rural backgrounds did not show differences in attitudes towards feminism. Similarly, education was found to be having no difference in attitude towards feminism. In addition, age does not influence attitudes toward feminism among students.

These results also show a pattern in both institutions; males are less feminist than females despite having different geographical backgrounds, age, or educational background that show a patriarchal system of society, which we also witness in our daily lives. These results answer the first research question, which stated that males are less feminine than females. Previous research also supports these results (Williams & Wittig, 1997). This study regarding the feminist identity noted that college women are more willing than college men to identify themselves as feminists.

The most unexpected result of this research was that education does not affect the perception of feminism. These findings are similar to age and geographical background. One of the plausible explanations is the family structure system in South Asia, which provides principles that govern the placement and authority of individuals in social settings (Pariwala, 1994). These principles mostly support patriarchy. Consequently, the internalization of these

rules through socialization could be the reason for these different results. In South Asian societies, this research is highly relevant because there are few studies on the topic of attitude towards feminism of religious seminary students and university students and the impact of background factors such as religiosity, their sect, rural and urban backgrounds, education, and gender of the respondents. This study helps us to understand the mindset of Pakistani youth towards feminism. In a similar vein, many previous studies support the results of this research. For instance, there are many things that men do to establish the power of masculinity and one of these is to oppose feminism.

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