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Religiosity and Superstitious Beliefs among Women in Punjab

Abstract

Believe in superstitions is still a common phenomenon in the Pakistani society. The paper investigates the determinants of superstitions (fortune telling, magic, superstitions related to children, marital issues and common superstitious practices) against religiosity.400 females were selected, 200 from city Sialkot and Sheikhupura & 200 from rural locale of Sialkot and Sheikhupura. The data was then analyzed through t-test and Analyses of Variance (ANOVA). Findings indicate that there is strong relationship between socio-demographics and types of superstitious beliefs. Further, significant differences were found between levels of religiosity and superstitious beliefs of women residing in Punjab.

Key Words: Religiosity, Superstitious Beliefs, Females, Punjab

Introduction

Superstition is "an irrational belief or practice resulting from ignorance or fear of the unknown. The validity of superstitions "is based on the belief in the power of magic and witchcraft and in such invisible forces as spirits and demons" (William, 1975).From the time of unwritten history of mankind, Homo sapiens have believed on super-natural things called superstitions. Mystical, superstitious and magical beliefs have been found in a varied range of cultures for thousands of years (Jahoda, 1969). Such beliefs are now no longer held in their extreme form, but it's reality that these are still alive or practiced in different societies. The present day scientific progress has enclosed the realities of natural phenomenon's having natural causes. Scientific ways of thinking and rationalization help to curtain superstitions. However, recent researches have shown that these beliefs continue to increase in modern times also (Newport & Strausberg, 2001) and researchers have long speculated about the origins and functions of such beliefs (Frazer, 1922; Jahoda, 1969; Malinowski, 1948 and Vyse, 1997).Studies have indicated that superstitious beliefs may increase during periods of uncertainty, or ambiguity, for example, Keinan (1994) found that during the Gulf War residents living in high stress areas (those most likely to be hit by a missile) reported higher levels of magical thinking than residents living in low stress areas. Similarly, Padgett and Jorgenson (1982) found that interest in astrology increased during the great depression of the United States and in Germany measures of superstition were directly related to measures of economic threat from 1918 to 1940. Malinowski (1954) found that Trobriand islanders had superstitious behavior when fishing in the lagoon where they had a high success rate as compared to superstitious behavior when fishing in the open sea, where there was a lower success rate.

Magical thinking refers to beliefs that defy culturally accepted laws of causality like beliefs in, among other things, clairvoyance, astrology, spirit influences, and telepathy. Wiseman and Watt (2004) argued that some superstitions are positive whist others are negative. In scales of superstitions, researchers stressed that negative superstitions like black cat can bring bad luck, breaking of mirror is a bad omen etc. are magically associated with unlucky and potentially harmful consequences. Whist positive superstitions could bring psychological comfort to an individual such as carrying a charm to bring good luck, touching wood, and crossing fingers, etc.

In Pakistan, people living in both urban as well rural areas have great belief in superstitions. And sometimes these superstitious beliefs are given cover in the name of religion. People particularly women, visit mazars (shrines) and do odd things like tying threads, bringing mud/dust as tabarak (precious) etc. People also visits Ammals (so called spiritual people) and do things as they are told to do, such as not wearing specific colors etc. People also believe in the use of magic including spells, charms or tricks for the solution of their problems. Magic is practiced to influence events and persons by supernatural means. Black magic is mostly used for its evil powers, for example, to do harms to others whilst White magic is used to induce fertility, care of the sick, having rainfall, good crops etc.(Planer, 1980). In addition, people also believe in spirits, ghosts, demons, witches and magic. The complex of all these diverse factors constitutes the picture of supernatural world, as the people in this country understand it. Moreover, believe in astrology have also become popular among people. Planer (1980) concludes that astrology is not practiced just in Rome and Greece but it's a global phenomenon as many known leaders of the world such as Hitler, Marshal, Lonnal and others had firmed believe on astrologers in respect to taking important decisions. Such behaviors exhibit a strong conglomeration of religious ideologies, which at times is a mixture of animism, polytheism and monotheism.

Purpose of the study

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This study aimed to explore the effect of levels of religiosity on superstitious beliefs among women. And also to investigate the role of various demographics on the superstitious behavior of women.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated for the present study:

$H_{01:}$ There is no effect of working status, locale, marital status, age and type of family system on superstitious beliefs among women.

$H_{02:}$ There is no effect of levels of religiosity on superstitious beliefs among women residing in the rural and urban areas of Punjab.

Methodology

The urban and rural females from Sheikhupura and Sialkot districts (the area of central Punjab) were selected as a universe as the researchers belong to these areas and were fully aware of the social and behavioral attitude of urban and rural females in the cultural background of these areas. Random sampling technique was used and a sample of 200 females each residing in rural and urban areas of Sheikhupura and Sialkot districts was taken. The rural areas of district Sheikhupura selected for this study includes Sohalkalan, Jandiala Sher Khan and of Sialkot district, Admkay Cheema, BonkanWalla. The research tools used in the study included a Superstitious Behavior Scale, designed for the purpose this study, as well as the Short Religiosity Critical Scale. The scores of respondents on the Religiosity Scale were divided into three levels: highly religious, moderately religious and less religious. The items scores on the Scale were coded from 1 to 3 with 5 answer options. Respondents with scores less than 1.0 fell in the category of less religious, scores from 1.1 to 2.0 as moderately religious, and scores from 2.1 to 3.0 as highly religious. The items were related to prayer, meditation, and religious services.

Data Analysis
The data was analyzed using the SPSS version 21 and consists of both the descriptive and inferential analysis.
Table 1

Effect of working status of women on superstitious beliefs of women

Profession	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig(p)
Non-Working	274	74.97	5.6	16.889	384.93	.000
Working	126	57.35	15.17			

An independent sample t-test was run to compare the effect of working status on the superstitious beliefs of women in Punjab. There was significant difference found in the superstitious beliefs of non-working (M=74.97, SD=5.6) and working (M=57.35, SD=15.17) women. This shows that working status of women is a determinant for superstitious beliefs among women in Punjab. The non-working women hold more superstitious beliefs than working women.
Table 2

Effect of locale on superstitious beliefs of women

Locale	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig(p)
Urban	200	51.41	13.14	22.69	270.98	.000
Rural	200	74.39	5.68			

The above Table shows a significant difference in the scores of women residing in the urban (M=51.41, SD=13.14) and rural (M=74.39, SD=5.68) areas; t (22.69), P=.000. This means that rural women were more superstitious than urban women.
Table 3

Effect of marital status on superstitious beliefs of women

Marital Status	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig(p)
Married	196	69.13	13.63	8.706	397.87	.000
Unmarried	204	56.91	14.45			

There was significant difference found in the scores of married (M=69.13 SD=13.63) and un-married (M=56.91, SD=14.45) women. This shows that marital status of women is a source of variation in determining superstitious beliefs among women in Punjab. Unmarried women had more superstitious behavior than married women.

Table 4

Effect of type of family on superstitious beliefs of women

Type of Family	N	Mean	SD	t	df	Sig(p)
Joint	159	73.15	8.55	14.38	390.38	.000
Nuclear	241	56.14	15.04			

Table 4 also shows a significant difference in the scores of women living in joint family system (M=73.15, SD=8.55) and nuclear family system (M=56.14, SD=15.04); t (390.38) = 14.38, P=.000. This means that women living in joint family had more superstitious beliefs than women living in nuclear family system.

Table 5

Effect of age on superstitious beliefs among women

Age	N	Mean	SD	f	df	Sig(p)
29yrs or less	134	75.31	6.16	99.81	397	.000
30 to 44yrs	156	57.50	13.54			
45yrs and above	110	55.43	16.24			

An one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the effect of age on superstitious beliefs among women. The data was divided into three groups (Group 1: 29yrs or less; Group 2: 30 to 44yrs; and Group 3: 45yrs and above). The analysis found a statistically significant difference at the $p < .05$ level among the three age groups: F (99.81) df=99.81, p =.000. As seen in Table 5, the mean difference between Group 2 (57.50) and Group 3 (55.43) was less as compared to the youngest age group (75.31). It means that the young women hold less superstitious beliefs as compared to older age groups.

Table 6

Effect of levels of religiosity on superstitious beliefs among women

Levels of Religiosity	N	Mean	SD	f	df	Sig(p)
High	275	51.51	15.51	37.93	397	.003
Moderate	78	55.42	16.60			
Less	47	66.97	12.99			

An one-way between-groups analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to explore the effect of religiosity on superstitious beliefs among women. Respondents were divided into three groups according to their scores on the Religiosity Scale (Highly religious; moderately religious and less religious). There was a statistically significant difference found at $p < .05$ level between superstitious beliefs of women and religiosity scores F (397) = 37.93, p = .003. The above table also shows that women having high religious scores tend to be less superstitious (M=51.5), whilst women with moderate religious scores were found to be less superstitious (M=55.4) than women with less religiosity scores (M=66.9). Hence, this means levels of religiosity among women are source of variation in determining of superstitious beliefs among women in Punjab. It shows the most religious women were least superstitious and vice versa.

Table 7

Mean Differences among levels of religiously and different sub actors of superstitions

Levels of Religiosity	Fortune Telling		Magic		Related to Children		Marital Issues		Common Superstitions	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
High	24.58	3.13	13.12	5.75	6.82	3.03	9.85	4.24	13.14	5.64
Moderate	25.55	3.20	15.24	6.94	7.46	3.14	10.69	4.50	14.89	6.08
Less	26.27	1.93	22.15	5.77	9.89	2.42	13.17	3.87	18.77	5.06

Table 7 shows the type of superstitious beliefs against levels of religiosity. Fortune telling was practiced the most by women. The highly religious women tend to rely less on superstitious beliefs (fortune telling, magic, children related issues, marital issues and common superstitions) as compared to the moderately religious and less religious women. The comparison between moderately religious and less religious women shows that the women with moderate religiosity tend to have more belief on superstitions related to fortune telling, magic , children , marital issues related than women with less religiosity. Hence, this shows that levels of religiosity among women are source of variation in determining various superstitious beliefs among women in Punjab.

Conclusion

The present paper is an attempt to investigate the persistence of certain forms of superstitions among urban and rural females. The data suggests that rural females were more superstitious than urban females. There are many factors behind such behaviors like educational attainment, family structure, awareness etc. Moreover, marital status of women was found another important determinant influencing the superstitious beliefs among women in Punjab. The married women have more exposure and understanding of social matters as compared to the unmarried women, therefore, probably have less belief in superstitions. And also unmarried women have less responsibility as compared to married women. The young women both married and unmarried hold more superstitious behavior as compared to older women. The women with age 35 plus, mostly understand the reality of superstitions, hence, are less superstitious.

The women having high religiosity were found to be less superstitious; the women with moderate religiosity tend to be more superstitious than women with less religiosity. The study concludes that belief in Allah and His teachings makes a person more fearless and less dependent on man-made false ways of problem solution. Further, women having strong faith on religion and its teachings get guidance from Allah in their daily life issues. The women having less faith in religion and its teaching are more in the state of chaos and uncertainty. The findings of the study are also consistent with previous researches. Keinan (1994) also concluded that superstitious beliefs may increase during periods of uncertainty and state of being religious.

The study suggests that political, religious, community leaders and educationists should make more efforts to educate the people, particularly women, to overcome problems created by superstitious behavior. Furthermore, religious values and ideals, which are based upon the true teachings of Islam, should be taught into the educational institutions. This will help to reduce irrational behavior and attitudes among the masses.

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