



Religiousness as an Indicator to Assess Psychological Capital

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ABSTRACT

The importance of religion and religious identities in human lives both in individual and social context is apparent. Religions are a usually part of all cultures which play a key role in people's daily lives. Taking into account this importance and also the fact that religiousness is a feature in character along using the results gained from the studies conducted regarding the relation between religiousness and psychological and mental health, this study attempts to find the affects of religiousness and positive behaviors on individual and social levels. It also proposes that promoting religiousness and providing religious instructions for the adolescents and youngsters can result in a positive behavior in the context of the society and increase the psychological capital.

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Introduction

In the last four centuries, the western societies have differentiated between the inner and outer worlds and have segregated the worldly activities from those like religion, spiritualism, and mysticism (Neal, 2003, p. 263). Many of the issues considered private once are now forcing their ways into the public domain (Shayegan, 2002, p. 32). The entrance of concepts such as, morality, principles, belief in God or higher-self, honesty, conscience, magnanimity and forgiveness, trust, generosity, kindness, emotions, consideration, the search for meaning in work, solidarity, the feeling of peace and coordination, altruism etc. in managerial and business researches all are indicative of the emergence of new paradigm (Fattahi, 2007). Wanger and Mrash (Wanger- Marsh 1999, p. 301) have decisively predicted that this new paradigm is the continuum of the third wave proposed by Alvin Taffler. They have called it the fourth wave (Shellenbarger, 2000, p. 1)

In general terms, religion has been in attention of many behavioral specialists as one of the main variables affecting the individuals' psychological modes so much, as some have found it as the main factor in the social and individual health (Sohrabi, 2001). It seems that religions provide their followers with some instructions that can help them cope with daily pressures and their psychological drawbacks which are proportionate to the followers' commitment in these instructions. It is believed that, in this context, religions affect in different ways which are mainly the social supports principle, the induction of meaning and optimism (Zahrakar, 1380)

The concept of religion

Religion exists in a special form in all known cultures. It is also an objective fact that historians study. It can be studied in regards to its rituals, symbolic figures and kinds of praying. A religious person puts himself in connection with the creation source that affects human life and other natural phenomenon (Wulf, 1997).

According to Erikson, in the continuum of the human history, religion is most significant factor that responds to the fundamental need of peace of mind. As a result, in societies where a stable religious ideology feeds the members' peace of

minds, everyone has a stable tendency toward life and hope in future and attempts in developing other aspects of character and solving the contradictions. Therefore, it can be said that the people who have reached a religious ideology have more developed characters (Erikson, 1968). A religious individual might cope better with the pressuring situations that a secular one. This behavior can appear at the time of accepting new responsibilities and also when dealing with new individuals. Religiousness even affects emotions, behaviors and thoughts of people (Saroglou, 2008).

Batson, Schoenrade and Ventis (1993) have given the following definition of religion (Reported by Arian 1999):

"Religion is what we, as human beings, do to find the answers to the questions we personally face, since we are aware that we and the others like us are now alive and will die in the future." They considered a few points when giving this definition of religion: the first is that there are existential questions for everyone (such as: what is the meaning and aim of life? Why are we here? etc.) Yet the importance of these questions and their forms differ from an individual to another. People face differently with these questions. This definition tries to include all the existentialistic issues that traditionally are connected to the term religion; such as the belief in God, praying, and different types of praying and practical and spiritual commitment.

The Role of Religion in Life

Adolescence has been defined as the stage that leads to adulthood and coping with great challenges. In this stage, an individual has to cope with the pressures and expectations of both periods (Ahadi, 1998). In the process of growth, an adolescent needs to get a stable condition in existential issues including religion (Markstrom, 1999). To reach this point, individual differences and also commitment, which refers to the gaining a stable selection of values and goals, play a significant role. According to Erikson, a person who is unable to find positive and stable values in a culture and religion or ideology will find contradictions in his ideals (Fartash, 2005). As a part of the growth process, an adolescent needs to create a completed personal opinion in regards to the existential issues including

religion in their lives (Markstrom, 1999). Some researches believe that religion by affecting the life style and the manner of solving contradictions, provides us with two fundamental human questions in regards to the aim of life and the meaning of his endeavors and talents (Berammer, 1993)

A Religious Approach

This approach finds spirituality as a part of a specific religion (Krishnakumar, 2002, p 155). For example, Christians believe that spirituality is a kind of invitation to work. They see work as collaboration with the divine creativity and a divine responsibility. Especially evangelical Christians, who are the followers of Martin Luther, believe that God is continuously creating and working is collaborating with the almighty (Naylor, 1996, p. 38). The Hindus believe that they must attempt and the outcome is in God's hands. They believe that working hard results in improvement of an individual's life as a whole and finally enriches the life and work completely (Jacobson, 1983). In Islam this viewed is usually expressed as Islamic Work Ethic (ISE). ISE encourages the Muslims to have a better commitment to the organization, cooperation, counseling, forgiveness, and etc. (Yousef, 2000, pp 513- 537). Taoists and the followers of Confucius value cooperation and team work (Krishnakumar, 2002). Among all approaches, the religious approach is probably the most controversial. As a case in point, Gunther claims that most of the Americans believe in God and also believe in the freedom of religions (Gunther, 2001).

Psychology of Religion

The onset of psychology of religion is the beginning of the current century. This arena drew a lot of psychological researchers' attention to itself at the turn of the century. The study of religion constitutes a major branch in the public psychology in America. More importantly William James in 1902 published his lectures by the title of empirical typology of religion and became to be known as a classical psychological study in the field (Callinas, 1996).

The study of religion and its being effective from psychological facts is one of the attractive issues for the psychology of religion. In this respect, different definitions of religion have been put forward and psychologists take different positions to them. Some like Erikson, Alport and James have a positive look at religion and others like Freud do not see the originality in religion and take a rather negative look at it.

The pivotal role of psychology of religion continued up to the world war. However, it was neglected afterwards. Today, attention to the mental processes and the development of psychology have put psychology of religion in the lime light again.

In defining the psychology of religion Tolse states that: "The study of psychology of religion is an attempt to understand the religious behavior and using psychological fundamentals which can be attained by studying behavior in general terms. In other words, psychology of religion is a branch of psychology that aims to study the role of religion in the being and health of the human soul. (Sheikhi, 1380)

Psychology of religion started with a tendency of measuring the belief that if transcendent truth exists or not. Psychology of religion is a field of studying religion and religious phenomenon in which psychological theories, concepts and methods are considered. This field is concerned with the relationship between religion (private and public) with the character, life, culture, human dimensions and his growth in the society (such as cognitive, emotional, social and ethical dimensions). It considers

religion as an effective issue which also can be affected by the psychological facts (Saroglou, 2002). In psychology of religion, religious belief is measured by the presence in churches and attending the rituals or by believing in a transcendent reality. While most of the religions in the world are committed to their religious themes, some of the theorists acknowledge religion as the main organizer of racial discrimination and violence and some others see as the main factor in mental health. (Duriez, 2004)

The relationship between the individual characteristics and religiousness

Character and personality are the most fundamental issues in psychology. Since the most pivotal issue in field such as learning, motivation, cognition, emotions, intelligence and thought which are main variables in this study (Shamlou, 2003) on the other hand in all divine religions the beginning of rites of passage are at stage of adolescence. At this stage continuous praying in the houses, churches, mosques and other holy places are bestowed on teenagers (Lotfabadi, 1999).

Individual differences in religion with personality have a deep relationship. In fact, characteristic features along with cultural adaptation are determinants of personal differences in religions. On the other hand, cultural differences determine the thoughts too.

Costa and McCrae (1978) propounded that belief in religion is a feature in character. This may establish the relation between the characteristics and belief in religion. The findings of the previous studies have also shown the role of religion in the differences between the characters.

Duriez and Swans (2006), using the five-factor theory of personality and religiousness, in their study by entitled "The character of identity styles and religiousness" which was performed on two groups of teenagers found that the subjects that had reached a stable religious ideology have a more developed character.

In another study conducted by Peeters with the title of "Character and religiousness", a meaningful relationship between religiousness with factors such as flexibility and responsibility were found.

Saroglou 2002 and 2003 and Duriez 2002 in independent studies found that religious subjects scored higher in the factor of responsibility than secular ones.

In another study conducted by Peeters 2003 entitled "Character and religiousness" a meaningful relationship between faith with factors such as flexibility and responsibility were found

Jorm and Christensen in 2004 conducted a research in the relationship between religion and character in which they concluded that the relation between character and religion is linear.

Relationship between Mental Health and Religiousness

The effects of religious belief on mental health is in a way that religion can create meaning in life and death. Religiousness also increases happiness and hope (Schere, 1989).

Allport believes that tendency to religion is an independent factor in human character which unifies all other elements in character. He found that in human character, human's whole life depends on his faith, meaning that the more one has inner faith, the more s/he enjoys mental health. However, as one utilizes their faith in order to cope with his social needs without considering its nature, the less mental health one enjoys.

World Health Organization (WHO) sees mental health very crucial in public health whose promotion is necessary. WHO define mental health as: state of health in an individual in which they know their capabilities, they can fight back the normal pressures in life, be useful for the society and are able to make decisions in and participate in team work. On this account mental health is the basis of health for individuals and the society (WHO, 2004).

One of the necessary criteria in mental health in families is having a coherent value system. Studies have shown that the cause of many conflicts and psychological disorders is value contradictions and lack of an organized value system in an individual (Desozan, 2006).

Many studies have conducted on the relation between religion and mental health. As an instance, Hosseini (2000), Aboghasemi (1997) and Khodarahimi (1999) have made attempts to find the relationship between religiousness and mental health and they all have found a positive correlation between mental health and religiousness. Aldrich (1991) conducted a research on mental health to find the relationship between religious activities and mental health and concluded that there is a meaningful correlation between mental health and religious activities. Bergin (1991) believes that religion prescribes a healthier life style for the people which, in turn, have a positive and meaningful effect on their mental health.

Positive Psychology

The first steps in positive psychology were taken by Martin Seligman in 1998 when he was the head of American Center of Psychology. His attempts were to find what affected the people positively and not negatively (Seligman, 2000, P5; Sheldon, 2001, P 216)

For many years psychologists had focused on pathological aspects of human behavior and had directed little attention to his positive features. However, a new movement has recently started which by focusing on the positive aspects of behavior is in a search for developing the individuals as well as societies. The effects of these can be seen on academic as well as practical studies (Luthans, 2002, p. 304).

Positive psychology is a term that covers all areas such as studying positive emotions, positive characteristic and healthy and strong organizations like family (Seligman, 2005).

By having its back on positive points in the individuals, positive psychology attempts to improve individual and organizational effectiveness. For instance, a person who feels he has a high potential to adapt with technological changes can be motivated by the human resource development programs and will flourish these potentials (Luthans, 2002).

Positive Organizational Behavior (POB)

Positive organizational behavior is a new arena in organizational behavior. POB is defined as: "The study and application of positive potentials and capabilities in human resources which can be developed and measured and effectively managed to improve the employees' performance. (Luthans, 2002, p. 59).

Fred Lutans is one of the pioneers of POB by focusing on positive human points in the work place instead of trying to manage the pitfalls. (Nelson, 2007)

Unlike positive psychology, POB does not claim any new findings in positivism but points out the necessity of focusing more on theorizing, studying and effective application of states, features and positive behaviors of the employees in the work place (Bakkar, 2008).

Psychological Capital

Psychological capital is one of the branches of positive psychology which is defined as the subject which deals with characteristics such as one's belief in his potentials and his ability to achieve, having perseverance in pursuing goals, creating positive documentation about oneself and tolerating hardships (Lutans, 2004, p. 45). Also having psychological capital enables individuals not only to cope better with stressful situations but also stand up against problems. It also enables the individuals to have a clear vision of themselves and not be affected by the outside circumstances and therefore have a higher mental health (Robbins, 1998).

Seligman believes that psychological capital covers the positive aspect of human life. He believes that human and social capital can easily be noticed and can easily be measured and controlled while psychological capital is more potential and measuring and developing is difficult (Seligman, 2000, p. 5). Consequently, psychological capital is defined as an individual definition of themselves, having goals to reach a stable situation in life and tolerance against the hardships (Goldsmith, 1997, p.133). Psychological capital, is a combinational and continuous structure which is comprised of four cognitive elements: hope, optimism, self-efficacy and resiliency.

These elements give meaning to individuals' lives in an interactive and value-seeking process and sustain their efforts in changing the stressful situation (Erez, 2001, p. 1270). They also prepare them to readily and resiliently cope with problems (Judge, 2001, p.80) and (Parke, 2001, p. 389). Among these elements, hope, along with the goals in life is a positive motivating state. On one hand motivation and willingness to achieve the goals and on the other hand seeking the appropriate to achieve the goals are hidden in hope (Baily, 2007, p. 233). Also self-efficacy is defined as the individual's judgment ability in performing a task (Bandura, 2008, p. 167). Optimism means having positive expectation in the outcomes and these outcomes are considered to be fixed and internal factors (Peterson, 2000, p. 44). Resiliency is a positive adaptation to negative situations. In fact resiliency is not the passive resistance when facing the hard and difficult situations but a resilient individual is an active cooperator and amender of his surroundings (Waller, 2001, p. 297).

Conclusion

Having faith and religiousness and practicing religious rituals can create a metaphysical drive in individuals. This metaphysical drive is an important psychological support for the people at the times of emotional hardship and crisis.

All the conducted studies show there is a meaningful relationship between one's religiousness and mental health as well as character. This means that a person who believes in a religion is generally considered healthy and normal who behaves appropriately in the context of the society which can be considered as positive behavior which can in turn motivate him/her towards the goals. As it was mentioned in section about psychological capital, psychological capital emphasizes the characteristics which cover positive aspects of life and is positive motivational state in an individual behavior. According to the conducted researched, it can be concluded that believing in religion and following its instruction in life, can create features that psychological capital insists on them and faith can be introduced as a dimension along with other dimensions (self-efficacy, optimism, resiliency and hope).

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