

## ***Role of Religious Coping in Parenting a Child with Down Syndrome***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*A large no of studies proposes that individuals frequently go to religion when facing upsetting or stressful life occasions. Parenting a child is filled with a lot of challenges. These challenges intensify when the child to be taken care of has some physical and mental deficiencies. All the prophets likewise experienced occasions of extraordinary hassles and stress, through such experiences they gradually remind Allah and make peace in recalling him. Training likewise pursued by our cherished Prophet. Thus the aim of this study is to explore the relationship of religious coping with stress, depression and anxiety, in parents having children with Down syndrome. Through purposive sampling 200 adults, having children with Down syndrome were recruited. The combination of Urdu version of Brief Religious Coping Scale and Depression, Anxiety, Stress Scale<sup>5</sup>were used to assess religious coping and parental distress of the selected participants. It was hypothesized: Inverse relationship exists between Positive religious coping and Psychological distress level in parents having children with Down syndrome. Whereas direct association exists between parental Psychological distress level and Negative religious coping mechanisms. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was analyzed to get the results and confirmed the hypotheses. The findings categorically suppose that through grounded association or stronger connection with Almighty Allah is a valuable coping in stress acknowledge by parents or guidance's of those children with Down syndrome.*

**Keywords:** Religious Coping, Anxiety, Depression, Down Syndrome.

## Introduction

Religion plays significant roles throughout the lifespan, and predominantly important when people face stressful life experiences.<sup>1</sup> Focusing on Allah and turning to religion while facing stressful situations is evident in religious scripture.

“Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me.”<sup>2</sup>

A huge group of researches has built up a connection between religion and physical and psychological health of individuals. Religion has a significant impact on human wellbeing and their performance. Religious mechanisms of handling stress are evident, when people approach these mechanisms for adapting to stress for availing and maintaining inner peace.<sup>3</sup> The effect of being religiousness and religious coping proficiency in sorting the crisis and changing and adapting the life circumstances is still in the process of exploration.<sup>4</sup> The Qur’ān says:

“And with Him are the keys of the unseen; no one knows them except Him. And He knows what is on the land and in the sea. Not a leaf falls but that He knows it. And no grain is there within the darkness of the earth and no moist or dry but that is [written] in a clear record.”<sup>5</sup>

Whenever any disease and damage came to human and the reasons are not clear or even when human are not able to comprehend it. Allah is always useful for mankind. In this regard always make sure that there is extraordinary wisdom behind the burden that Allah keeps on us and that it motivate us with the chance to build up a closer connection with Allah. As people, obviously we have choice and are allowed to pick our own game-plan in some random situation; however the finest response will be tolerance, persistence and acknowledgment. Holy Prophet ﷺ acknowledged, that all the humans has to cross several trials, depending on the height of faith and through these trials and experiences, human can purified from their bad deeds. He stated, all humans will experience the test by the degree of their religious responsibilities, and the hardships will be continuous until he is left strolling on the essence of the earth with no weight of sins at all.<sup>6</sup>

“And certainly, We shall test you with something of fear, hunger, loss of wealth, lives and fruits, but give glad tidings to the patient ones.”<sup>7</sup>

Incentive behind human sufferings in Allah's arrangement may have two consequences. The first one is, there is no inconsistency between the

overwhelming traits of Allah and the exists of sufferings; so the evidence of the Qur'ān with respect to Allah's power isn't questionable:

"Say 'Allah, holder of all sovereignty, You give control to whoever You will, and remove it from whoever You will. You elevate whoever You will and humble whoever You will. All that is good lies in Your hands: You have power over everything.'"<sup>8</sup>

Allah is without a doubt, responsible for his creation and suffering must lasts by his permission. The Second consequence is, if sufferings is tilted as a test/trial and is seen as an important segment of existence. Than Muslims must analysis the bothersome circumstances (disabilities, sickness, and money related trouble, loss of a friend or family member, and so on.) as a possibility to accomplish his inner potentials and go ahead in his divine/spiritual journey.<sup>9</sup>

### **Religious Coping:**

People use religious coping strategies to overcome daily hassles related with work, family, friend, health, environment and deal effectively. Abi Hashim reported in his study that religious coping is correlated positively with mental well-being.<sup>10</sup> Simultaneously research studies showed that religion operates as a coping mechanism for individuals who experience major life stress, such as dealing with cancer,<sup>11</sup> accidents,<sup>12</sup> raising a handicapped child,<sup>13</sup> or the death of a child.<sup>14</sup>

"Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."<sup>15</sup>

Few researches are conducted in considering the role of religion coping in adapting to day by day bothers or minor stressors. Kanner describe daily bothers as the annoying, displeasing and stress provoking demands that to some extent distinguished from daily contact with the surrounding. The finding showed that people utilize religious mechanisms to cope with hassles they faced on daily basis. Ongoing investigations have demonstrated that while facing major life stressors people usually involved in religion by utilizing religious coping process to overcome their stress.<sup>16</sup>

Having a child is a blessing, but if the child is with disability than taking care of this special child is filled with a lot of potential challenges faced by the parents or caregivers.<sup>17,18</sup> Down syndrome (DS), trisomy 21, a hereditary disorder with development hindrance and intellectual disability. The ratio is about one per 1,000 babies born each year.<sup>19</sup> The possibility of long term future care, extra therapeutic expenses; unavailability of adequate educational programs for special need children and lack of individual support services in Pakistan and the stigma

related to having a disabled child for has a lot of pressure on the parents. Allah has a plan for everyone and the fulfillment of that plan is upon people and on their choices, and on extent of faith, persistence and determination. Number of studies specify that parents having children with mental retardation are usually at risk for developing psychological problems, parental psychological distress level<sup>20</sup> and emotional difficulties.<sup>21,22,23</sup> Everything happens by the approval of Allah, whatever happens and whatever not, all does by his will.<sup>24</sup>

“After all, Allah has promised us that our lives are a test for us. Degrees and forms of our trials vary from person to person, even family to family. However, it is up to us to have fortitude, accept our fate, and then actively work to make the best out of them. Indeed, Allah has promised us that “with every hardship there is relief.”<sup>25</sup> And that “no person shall have a burden laid on him greater than he can bear.”<sup>26</sup>

Muslim used to cope with life problems with religious background. As soon as a Muslim is occupied in a love of Allah even as admitting his weaknesses and his need for Him, then he can realize the meaning of world and then take right step for his difficulties and problems he is facing and will be able to correct his perception and attitude toward his family. The baseline is that submission to God provides him with satisfaction, guidance and can learn how to manage life and problem facing in it.<sup>27</sup>

### **Religious Coping and Major Stress:**

In Islam, the reason for disability isn't attributed as bad behavior by individuals or else their behaviors. Islam as a religion sees disability as a trial by Allah.<sup>29</sup> The Qur'ān advises humans to take care of those individuals who are with scholarly handicaps, and treat them with thoughtfulness. Prophet PBUH appeared to treat crippled individuals by all means of respect.<sup>30</sup>

A significant part is that how guardians adjust to the difficulties related with bringing up a child with disability depend upon their adapting techniques. Studies revealed that Positive religious adaption predicts more noteworthy degree of psychological well-being while negative religious adapting identifies with more adverse emotional wellness.<sup>31</sup> Studies in this domain likewise recommend that parents with more prominent stress utilizing progressively more religious adapting strategies and when stress reduced they gain extreme degree of inward peace.<sup>32</sup> Religion can give an advantage for adapting with disability and essential for understanding the consequence in critical circumstances. In such a challenging situation Muslims who engage in a worship of Allah and try to connect with the Almighty are able to cope with the

difficulties and problems in caring for their special child. Furthermore offering prayers and regular religious accomplishments discharged all the negative emotions.<sup>33</sup>

Guardians of children with Down syndrome go through maximum pressure and stress and experience reduced mental prosperity in difference of normally developing children's parents or guardians. In this way, it is essential to increase our knowledge of parental or guardian current degree of anxiety and stress as it can be diminished by acquiring greatest degree of internal peace during religious coping skills adaptation. At the point when individuals facing stress, they utilize certain procedures to adapt to their worries, to control their feelings for having internal peace. Religion can also give a benefit to those who handle with disabilities.<sup>34</sup>

Studies shows that Parents and siblings of Down syndrome children experience stress in different ways or at different level, that push them toward the edge of clinically abnormalities with maximum stress and depression at various phases of their life.<sup>35</sup>

The presence of stigma, unavailability of structured educational programs and lack of family and environmental support in Pakistan some parents or guardians still deeply worth these children with Down Syndrome and perceive them as a Allah almighty blessing upon them,<sup>36</sup> whereas few parents perceive these children as a source of stress in their life. Significant point of distress and depression related to low degree of internal peace and progressively emotional well being in these parents. When parents take more stress about the life of their child and move in haphazard directions, they usually put themselves at risk of higher psychological issues.<sup>37</sup>

**The Holy Quran Affirms:**

While Allah is responsible for the "whole" the entire world and he is the only one who can reduce our stress and worries, but this don't mean we ought to flip aside everything and beliefs that things will happened in anyway, but in fact we effectively look for approaches to deal with our pressure and need to be active in stress management pathway. "Verily Allah does not change men's condition unless they change their inner selves."<sup>38</sup>

"And surely we try you with something of fear and hunger, and loss of wealth and crops, but give glad-tidings to the steadfast, who when a misfortune befalls them, say lo! we are Allah's (possession of Allah) and to Him shall we surely return. Such are they on whom are blessings from their Lord, and mercy. Such are the rightly-guided." <sup>39</sup>

Supporting verses are evidenced in the Holy Quran with regard to coping with the stressors and difficulties in life.

Quran says "He guides to Himself those who turn to Him in penitence - Those who have believed and whose heart have rest in the remembrance of God. Verify in the remembrance of God, do hearts find rest."<sup>40</sup>

"O you who believe, seek help with steadfastness and prayer. For God is with those who are steadfast."<sup>41</sup>

Religious coping mechanisms have the elements of both emotional focused coping and problem focused coping. Same mechanism is applied on religious coping strategies, which stand on Islamic coping mechanism included prayers, appeal to God, patients, faith in Allah decision, searching lesson in every happening, reading of Holy Qur'ān, gradually reduce stress, and depression in their life's<sup>42</sup>. The given Qur'ān verses give us a perceptive about the resolution of any kind of life stressor:

"As for those who says, " Our Lord is God," and then follow the straight path (in their belief, thought and action) without deviation, the angels descend upon them from time to time (in the world as protecting comrades and in the hereafter, with the message)."<sup>43</sup>

In another verses "Such is God, your Lord; there is no deity but He, the creator of all things; therefore, worship Him alone. He holds all things in His care and control."<sup>44</sup>

Number of studies has established that religious coping is usually allied to more optimistic outcome to stressful dealings. Pargament<sup>45</sup> reported religious coping mechanism includes the faith in an impartial and affectionate God, as a helpful collaborator, contribution in religious ceremonies, and looking into religious and individual help were considerably connected to healthier outcomes.<sup>46</sup>

A study found a positive association between parenting and religion. Religion as an adapting resource utilized by guardians of children with disabilities showed that religion was utilized by parents as an adapting skill where Prayers, participation in religious services and precise religious beliefs were recognized as basis of internal help to experience an intensifying sense of hope and strength in parenting children with disabilities.<sup>47</sup>

The flow of modern studies work on parental pressure and emotional suffering while parenting children with intellectual obstacles in the UAE. The finding showed that the severity of the child's disability has major impact on parental psychological distress level.<sup>48</sup> Another study explores the difference in coping

strategies utilized by parents of children with and without disabilities. Availing Social Support with all other resources is considered the habitual technique utilized by the parents for adapting with children having mental disabilities.<sup>49</sup> Studies disclose attention-grabbing associations between religion/spirituality and psychological health and verify the significance of religion for overseeing distressing circumstances. Religious factors (e.g., religiosity, repetition of religious participation, significance of religious belief) describe less about the particular religious adapting behavior that individuals utilize while facing the life stressors. For knowing the role of religion in the individual adapting process and its functions, it is essential to look at the active pathways, utilized by the individuals in specific circumstances. The finding of the previous studies shows that individuals' regularly offering prays, going to church, or following religious television for long is not enough for fulfilling the religiosity. Actualization of religion is, to what extant people understand and follow the ways of religion to deal with daily stressors.<sup>50</sup>

**Objective:**

The purpose of the current study is to explore the association of religiosity with internal peace and mental health. For this purpose the study identifies the correlation of religious coping with psychological distress in those parents having children with Down syndrome.

**Based on the above researches the hypotheses of the present study was**

- (1) Indirect relationship exists between positive religious coping and Psychological distress level of parents while parenting a Down syndrome child.
- (2) Direct or optimistic correlation exists between negative religious coping and Psychological distress level in parents of Down syndrome children.

**Methodology**

The study included 200 parents, 100 mothers and 100 fathers of children with Down syndrome. The discrepancy in mothers' age is from 25 to 50 years similar to fathers' age range in this sample.

**Instruments:**

**i) Demographic details:**

The demographic details of this study included the gender age of parents and children as well, qualification, number of children parents have, their ages and gender, birth order of DS child, parents and child's education, socioeconomic status and occupation.

**ii) Depression Anxiety and Stress Scales (DASS)**

This scale is developed by Lovibond and Lovibond<sup>51</sup> in 1995 and translated in Urdu by Aslam in 2007 was used to measure the psychological distress. It's a self

administered short version scale consisting of 21 items, divided into three subscales. Parents were requested to use 4-point rating scale to give their nearest answer. The alpha reliability of the Urdu translated scales are .72 for (Depression), .74 (Anxiety), and .76 for Stress.<sup>52</sup>

### iii) Brief Religious Coping Scale:

This Scale is developed by Pargament, Smith, Koenig and Perez in 1998, and modified by Pargament et al., in 2000.<sup>53</sup> This scale consists of 14 items measuring positive and negative religious coping.<sup>54</sup>

**Religious Coping (Positive) Subscale:** This subscale identifies how the individual utilizes religious adapting resources when they face stressful circumstances. This subscale comprises of seven items with the alpha reliability of 0.77.

**Religious Coping (Negative) Subscale:** This subscale evaluates the use of religious adapting as a negative source of handling the stressful event. It also comprises of seven items with the alpha reliability of 0.65.

### Procedure:

Self-report measure was individually administered to each participant after their consent. The researcher explained to the participants the questionnaire and clarified any queries made by the participants. For recruiting parents of Down syndrome children, only those parents were selected, who fulfill the inclusion criteria of the research study. Self report measure was individually administered to each participant and the researcher was present during the process of questionnaire administration. All participants were assured of confidentiality.

### Findings:

Relationship between religious coping (both positive and negative) with psychological distress in Parents having Children with Down syndrome (N = 200)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Stress	1	.72**	.61**	-.34**	.45**	-.41**
2. Depression	-	1	.80**	-.53**	.55**	-.63**
3. Anxiety	-	-	1	-.45**	.53**	-.61**
4. Positive Religious Coping	-	-	-	1	-.28**	.74**
5. Negative Religious Coping	-	-	-	-	1	-.38*

Note.\* = p < .05; \*\* = p < .01

The above table clarifies the relationship between variables under investigation. The findings shows that Positive mean of religious coping is noteworthy inversely related with depression with the significant value of ( $r = -.53, p < .01$ ) for depression, ( $r = -.45, p < .01$ ) for anxiety and ( $r = -.34, p < .01$ ) for stress. These findings clarifies that the first hypotheses is accepted. Whereas, negative means of religious coping has considerable direct relationship with depression with the significant value of ( $r = .55, p < .01$ ) for depression, ( $r = .53, p < .01$ ) anxiety and for stress ( $r = .45, p < .01$ ). These findings also shed a light on the support of second hypotheses.

**Discussion:**

The findings of this research strongly supports the hypotheses, whereas results showed that the parents or guardians who parenting a child with special needs such as Down syndrome, when they utilized more positive religious coping also experienced lower level of psychological distress. The results are consistent with prior studies where researches showed that Positive means of religious adaptation predicted greater level of mental health. These findings can be understood by the fact that parental coping approaches are essential to reduce anxiety, stress, and level of depression. The demands of taking care of the responsibilities of a child with special needs can be so overpowering and overshadowing the parent's mental health and that can eventually lead to the breakdown of the parents. Therefore studies showed that when parents used more positive religious coping they reported less stress, less depressive symptoms and higher levels of subjective well-being.<sup>55</sup>

Thus having deep rooted faith in Allah or "tawakkal" encompasses a strong coping mechanism to protect the parents from psychological pain. Feeling strong positive connection with Allah S.W.T. also promoted feeling of patience, comfort, peace of mind and soul and brought in the calming state that is a necessity to deal with the needs of a special child in daily basis. Thus Religiosity and Islamic ways of handling or adapting with stressful happenings and demanding event has a huge role in maintaining psychological health<sup>56</sup> and faith, principals and performance of religious practices have been confirmed to have an optimistic impact on handling stress.<sup>57</sup>

Furthermore the findings implies that religious coping served as a stress buffer effect, that is the parents used religion as a coping tool with their stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms. Through these coping parents are clear to locate meaning in stressful circumstances of parenting their child and gained comfort and closeness to Allah S.W.T. as a resultant of their trusting and confident relationship with Allah S.W.T. The findings of the present study showed that

parents of children with Down syndrome who used more negative mean of religious coping, were engaged in discontentment and insecure connection with their religious belief showed greater level of psychological distress. Parent beliefs that their children are burden on their families. As they are not happy or satisfied with the decision of Allah, the caught in the cycle of self blaming, considering their child with special needs as a sin or a punishment for their bad deeds from Allah, ignoring their children, staying away from religion and religious activities lead them toward poorer mental health.

The conclusion of this research clarifies; religious coping helps parents in minimizing their psychological distress. The strong positive connection with Allah S.W.T brings in comfort and hope needed to take care of the needs of their child. This study confirmed the fact that inward harmony can be preserve through the religious belief system and religious mode of coping mechanism in parents, dealing with major life stressor.

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