

Journal of Religion & Society (JR&S)

Available Online:

<https://islamicreligious.com/index.php/Journal/index>

Print ISSN: 3006-1296 Online ISSN: 3006-130X

Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)

**Investigating the Role of Religiosity and Spirituality in Shaping
Attitudes Toward Homosexuality Among Muslim Youth in Pakistan**

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the role of religiosity and spirituality in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality among Muslim youth in Pakistan. Using a cross-sectional design, data were collected from 246 participants aged 18–29 years through standardized tools (the Homosexuality Attitude Scale, the Religiosity and Spirituality Scale for Youth). Descriptive statistics revealed moderate levels of religiosity and spirituality and an overall moderate to low acceptance of homosexuality. Independent samples t-tests indicated significant gender and marital status differences, with females and unmarried individuals demonstrating more favorable attitudes toward homosexuality. Pearson correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between religiosity and positive attitudes toward homosexuality, while spirituality showed a weak but positive correlation. Multiple regression analysis revealed that religiosity was a strong negative predictor of attitudes toward homosexuality. Overall, 27.8% of the variance in attitudes was observed. The findings highlight the significant role of religious orientation in shaping moral and social perspectives on homosexuality in a religiously driven society. These insights have implications for policymakers, educators, and mental health practitioners addressing sexual diversity among youth in Pakistan.

Keywords: Religiosity, Spirituality, Attitudes Formation, Homosexuality, Muslim Youth.

Introduction

Homosexuality remains one of the most contentious and debated topics in the 21st century, particularly due to persistent societal taboos and strong religious condemnation. Although progress has been made in normalizing and legalizing same-sex relationships in several countries, significant opposition persists in various regions, particularly where religious influence remains strong. The declassification of homosexuality as a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association (APA) in 1973, and later by the World Health Organization (WHO) in 1992, was a turning point in its conceptualization as a normal variant of human sexuality (Srivastava, 2021; Sulthana et al., 2021). Today, homosexuality is not merely a matter of sexual orientation but also a political and social identity intertwined with human rights movements (Ahmed, 2015). Despite global progress, some religious and cultural beliefs continue to consider homosexuality as immoral or unnatural, particularly in Muslim-majority societies. Attitudes are psychological tendencies expressed by evaluating a particular entity with some degree of favor or disfavor (Bentea, 2015). Attitudes toward homosexuality are shaped by emotional, cognitive, and behavioral components, encompassing how individuals think, and behave toward homosexual people or practices (Duhaylungsod et al., 2018). Historically, homosexuality was criminalized and pathologized, but recent decades have seen a broader cultural shift, particularly in Western societies, toward viewing homosexuality as a natural aspect of human diversity (Ahmed, 2015). Despite this trend, in many societies, including Muslim-majority countries, homosexuality remains immoral. The conceptualization of homosexuality has changed by focusing on behavior with the help of early interventions and then identifying orientation and characterization with the developmental stages (Adejuwon, 2020).

It has been noted in various studies that demographic variables can influence attitudes toward homosexuality. A prominent factor is gender, where men report more negative attitudes toward homosexuals generally, chiefly gay men, than women (Gutierrez, 2021). This could be related to culturally assigned gender roles and expectations of masculinity. While females usually show more tolerance, even though some research reports discomfort toward

lesbians (Ting et al., 2016). Age is the next crucial entity. Younger people tend to exhibit liberal attitudes, generally influenced by more exposure to inclusive media and education (Vijay et al., 2018; Ling & Ting, 2021). As age progresses, individuals may convert to more conservative views because of the cultural norms established during their developmental years (Pew Research Center, 2013). Next up is education, another significant factor, as higher levels of education are associated with better attitudes toward homosexuality (Nguyen & Blum, 2014). Socioeconomic status (SES) has a predictive significance, as individuals with upper SES often show greater acceptance of homosexuality due to enhanced communication with liberal society and exposure to multiethnic values (Bernardo, 2013; Sani & Quaranta, 2022). Political creed, modernism, and prior contact with homosexual individuals also shape attitudes. Liberalists are generally better supporters, while conventionalists are more likely to oppose LGBTQ rights (Horn & Heinze, 2011). Urban inhabitants, who are frequently exposed to diversity, often show more tolerance than rural people (Sulthana et al., 2021).

Religiosity and spirituality are two distinct constructs, but are linked with each other. Religiosity is considered the intensity of religious belief and acts performed, often within prearranged contexts, though spirituality has a broader sense; it is the pursuit of meaning and connection (Huber & Huber, 2012; Lassiter et al., 2019). Religiosity is strongly linked to negative attitudes toward homosexuality (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019). Religious doctrines, particularly those of monotheistic faiths, often define homosexuality as immoral, sinful, or unnatural. Studies have found that religiosity is a stronger predictor of homonegative attitudes than gender or ethnicity (Saunders & Samantha, 2008). Regular attendance at religious services, engagement in religious communities, and exposure to religious teachings are all associated with opposition to same-sex relationships (Schnabel, 2016). In contrast, spirituality may be less rigid, allowing for personal interpretations that can be more inclusive (Bussey, 2021). However, the literature on the role of spirituality in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality is limited (Castaneda, 2019).

Religious beliefs are among the most significant predictors of attitudes toward homosexuality. Across faiths, particularly within

Abrahamic traditions (Islam, Christianity, and Judaism), homosexuality is frequently outlined as deviant or sinful behavior (Nakamura, 2014). Religious communities often interpret sacred texts as condemning same-sex relations, which reinforces societal stigma (Franczak, 2014). Individuals deeply embedded in religious life often perceive homosexuality as a violation of divine law and moral order. Religious teachings can affect not only personal attitudes but also public policy. For instance, resistance to same-sex marriage in many countries is driven by religious lobbying. Negative attitudes are further reinforced by fears of divine punishment or societal decline (Balkin et al., 2009; Westergard, 2020). The belief that homosexuality is a choice rather than a biologically influenced orientation is also more prevalent among religious individuals, contributing to increased prejudice (Saucier, 2011).

Islamic teachings universally regard homosexual behavior as sinful and contrary to the natural order (*fitrah*). The Qur'an recounts the story of the people of Lut (Lot), who were destroyed due to their engagement in same-sex acts, and this narrative is often cited as divine condemnation of homosexuality (Saeed & Abbas, 2022). Several hadiths reinforce this view, with Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warning against the acts of the people of Lut (Zelin & Olidort, 2016). Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*) considers homosexual acts punishable offenses, though scholars differ in their interpretation of appropriate sanctions (Ahmadi, 2012). While Islam emphasizes self-control and resistance against sinful desires, individuals with same-sex attractions are encouraged to seek spiritual guidance, resist temptation, and not act upon their impulses (Ahmed, 2015). The notion of *jihad* (struggle) is reinterpreted as an internal struggle to resist unlawful desires. Muslim-majority communities are among the least accepting of homosexuality globally. Cultural, legal, and religious structures work in tandem to suppress open discussion and visibility of LGBTQ identities (Adamczyk et al., 2018). Surveys reveal that Muslims express more conservative views than adherents of other religions, with rejection often justified through theological principles and community norms (Ting et al., 2016; Glas & Spierings, 2021).

Muslim youth today are at the crossroads of traditional religious teachings and modern liberal values. Studies suggest that young Muslims are generally less accepting of homosexuality compared to their non-Muslim peers, though those exposed to diverse environments or higher education demonstrate more tolerant views (Jäckle & Wenzelburger, 2015; Yeo et al., 2021). The disharmony between religious roles and exposure to the global human rights agenda often creates cognitive dissonance for various Muslims, especially youth. Although they are taught to sustain Islamic values that exclude homosexual acts, they also confront narratives promoting LGBTQ inclusion in education, media, and peer relations (Ahmed, 2015). This duality often results in internal conflict, particularly among those in Western or multicultural civilizations.

The connection of Islam and attitudes toward homosexuality is multilayered. As demographic variables contribute to attitude formation, religiosity persists as one of the most significant predictors. Islamic directions (rooted in the Qur'an and Sunnah) explicitly prohibit homosexual behavior and emphasize spiritual struggle over desire. Muslim youngsters are mainly vulnerable to the conceptual conflict between traditional teachings and modern views. The relationship between religiosity, spirituality with attitudes toward homosexuality is chiefly under-researched among young Muslims. Existing literature narrates religiosity as a significant predictor of aversive attitudes toward homosexuality, especially among believers of monotheistic faiths such as Islam (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019). However, partial attention has been given to differentiating the impact of personal spirituality from formal religiosity in shaping such attitudes. The current article tries to fill this gap by explaining the role of religiosity and spirituality in shaping Muslim youth's attitudes toward homosexuality.

Method

Objectives

1. To study the association of religiosity and spirituality with attitudes toward homosexuality among Muslim youth in Pakistan.
2. To examine the impact of demographic variables on attitudes toward homosexuality.

3. To explain the effect of religiosity and spirituality in forming positive or negative attitudes toward homosexuality.

Hypotheses

H1: Enhanced religiosity will be associated with a negative attitude toward homosexuality among Muslim youth in Pakistan.

H2: More inclination towards spirituality will be linked with negative attitudes toward homosexuality among Muslim youth.

H3: Male participants will demonstrate more negative attitudes toward homosexuality compared to female participants.

H4: Higher educational attainment will be associated with more accepting attitudes toward homosexuality.

H5: Religiosity will be a stronger predictor of negative attitudes toward homosexuality than spirituality.

Research Design & Sample

A cross-sectional quantitative research design will be employed to examine the relationship between religiosity, spirituality, and attitudes toward homosexuality among Muslim youth. The study had targeted Muslim youth aged 18–29 years from diverse educational and socioeconomic backgrounds. A sample of approximately 246 participants will be recruited using purposive and snowball sampling methods across universities and online platforms.

Instruments

1. *Homosexuality Attitude Scale (HAS)* used to assess participants' attitudes toward homosexuality. HAS is a reliable and validated tool that evaluates affective, behavioral, and cognitive components of attitudes toward homosexual individuals (Kowalski, 1997).
2. *Religiosity and Spirituality Scale for Youth (RaSSY)* assessed both religiosity and spirituality among participants. RaSSY was developed to measure the unique expressions of religiosity and spirituality in youth populations, covering personal religious beliefs, spiritual experiences, and religious practices (Walker & Dixon, 2002).

Procedure

Participants were invited to complete an anonymous questionnaire consisting of demographic questions and the two instruments (both online and in-person). Informed consent was obtained electronically before participation. Data confidentiality and participant anonymity were ensured throughout the study.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant Institutional Review Board (IRB). Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without any penalty. All data was stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Results

Table 1 *Frequency and Percentage of Demographic Variables (N = 246)*

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	104	42.3%
	Female	142	57.7%
Socioeconomic Status	Low	38	15.4%
	Middle	169	68.7%
	High	39	15.9%
Education Level	Secondary	42	17.1%
	Undergraduate	128	52.0%
	Graduate	63	25.6%
	Postgraduate	13	5.3%
Marital Status	Married	45	18.3%
	Unmarried	201	81.7%

The sample had more female participants. Most individuals belonged to the middle socioeconomic class and held undergraduate degrees. The vast majority were unmarried.

Table 2 *Descriptive Statistics and internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha) of the scales (N = 246)*

Variable	α	M	SD	Min	Max	Skewness	Kurtosis
Religiosity	0.89	3.55	0.77	1.00	5.72	-0.35	-0.41
Spirituality	0.81	3.22	0.57	1.57	4.74	0.10	-0.45
Homosexuality Attitude	0.86	4.26	0.64	2.61	5.91	-0.30	0.20

The means suggest moderate levels of religiosity and spirituality, with an overall moderately positive attitude toward homosexuality. The distribution of variables shows mild skewness and acceptable levels of kurtosis. All three scales demonstrated good to excellent internal consistency, supporting the reliability of the measurements used in this study.

Table 3 *Correlation Among Study Variables*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Religiosity	-		
2. Spirituality	-.04	-	
3. Homosexuality Attitude	-.49**	.11*	-

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Religiosity was significantly and negatively correlated with attitudes toward homosexuality ($r = -.49$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher religiosity was associated with less favorable attitudes. Spirituality was weak but positively correlated with attitudes ($r = .11$, $p < .05$).

Table 4 *Independent Samples t-Test for Attitudes Toward Homosexuality based on Gender and Marital Status (N = 246)*

Variable	Group	M	SD	t (df=244)	p	95% CI (LL, UL)	Cohen's d
Gender	Male	4.18	0.60	-2.43	.016	0.06, 0.60	0.33
	Female	4.34	0.66				
Marital Status	Married	4.08	0.57	-2.14	.033	0.02, 0.59	0.31
	Unmarried	4.30	0.65				

There were significant differences in attitudes toward homosexuality based on gender and marital status. Female and unmarried participants showed significantly more favorable attitudes than males and married individuals. The effect sizes were small to moderate (Cohen's $d = 0.33$ and 0.31 , respectively).

Table 5 *Multiple Regression Predicting Attitudes Toward Homosexuality (N = 246)*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Intercept	5.02	0.35	—	14.34	.000
Religiosity	-0.40	0.05	-0.48	-8.56	.000
Spirituality	0.10	0.06	0.09	1.58	.115

$R^2 = .278$, *Adjusted* $R^2 = .259$, $F(6, 239) = 15.30$, $p < .001$

The regression model significantly predicted attitudes toward homosexuality, explaining 27.8% of the variance. Religiosity remained a strong negative predictor ($\beta = -0.48$, $p < .001$). Gender and marital status also emerged as significant predictors: female and unmarried participants were more likely to express favorable

attitudes. Spirituality and socioeconomic status were not significant predictors in this model.

Discussion

The present study investigated how religiosity and spirituality contribute to attitudes toward homosexuality among Muslim youth in Pakistan, while also examining the effects of gender and educational attainment. Considering the socio-cultural and religious context of Pakistan, these findings offer significant insights into the complex interplay between belief systems and sexual diversity.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the results confirmed that higher levels of religiosity are significantly associated with more negative attitudes toward homosexuality. This finding aligns with a wide body of literature emphasizing the central role of Islamic teachings in shaping sexual ethics among Pakistani youth (Ahmed, 2015; Saeed & Abbas, 2022). The Islamic teachings (Quran and Hadith) forbid homosexual acts, and these sayings are strengthened via religious schooling, addresses, and familial ethics. The dominating averse correlation and significant regression values indicate that religiosity remains a foundational element of moral evaluation among young Muslims in Pakistan, profoundly rooted in religious socialization from initial juvenile stages.

Hypothesis 2 stated that more spirituality would be linked with negative attitudes, but the findings did not support this statistically. Although spirituality and religiosity are often used interchangeably, this study highlights their divergent influences. Spirituality showed a weak and nonsignificant correlation with attitudes toward homosexuality, suggesting that spiritual youth may rely more on personal experiences, inner values, and reflective practices than on institutional religious doctrines. This echoes prior findings (Castaneda, 2019; Lomash et al., 2019) and may indicate a subtle generational shift toward individualized belief systems even within conservative settings. However, spirituality did not predict attitudes significantly, thereby failing to confirm Hypothesis 2.

In support of Hypothesis 3, male participants exhibited significantly more negative attitudes toward homosexuality compared to females. This aligns with existing research on gender

and homonegativity (Ting et al., 2016; Gulevich et al., 2021). In Pakistani society, where hegemonic masculinity and honor culture are entrenched, men may perceive non-heteronormative behavior as a threat to traditional masculine identity. Socialization patterns often emphasize rigid gender roles for males, which can lead to stronger adherence to heterosexist norms and intolerance toward deviation from those norms.

Hypothesis 4 stated that higher educational attainment would be associated with more accepting attitudes toward homosexuality. The analysis partially supported this hypothesis. Participants with greater educational exposure showed more positive attitudes, consistent with studies indicating that higher education promotes critical thinking, tolerance, and awareness of human rights (Nguyen & Blum, 2014; Sani & Quaranta, 2022). It has been observed easily that the Pakistani urban and higher-education organizations often offer more exposure to global expression on sexual diversity and hence contribute towards more diverse perspectives among educated youngsters.

Lastly, the fifth hypothesis was strongly supported by the regression statistics, which indicated that religiosity was a significantly stronger predictor of aversive attitudes than spirituality. After controlling demographic variables, religiosity persisted as the primary factor impacting intolerance toward homosexuality. This narrative suggests that religious belief remains a dominant influence in transforming sexual morality among Pakistani youth. This is proven with the study of Adamczyk and colleagues (2018), who put forth that Muslim communities tend to portray the most conventional attitudes toward LGBTQ+ issues globally.

Altogether, these conclusions highlight the lasting influence of religious identity on developing perceptions toward homosexuality in Pakistan. Results also suggest some domains for consideration, which may influence future generations of Pakistan, as higher education and interaction with diverse ideations may progressively lead to more inclusive attitudes. Nevertheless, interventions must respect cultural and religious kindness to be effective (Zulkffli et al., 2022).

Religiosity and Attitudes Toward Homosexuality

Consistent with prior literature (Haryanto, 2016; Janssen & Scheepers, 2019), religiosity emerged as a strong negative predictor of favorable attitudes toward homosexuality. This suggests that young Muslims who adhere more closely to religious teachings are more likely to perceive homosexuality unfavorably. The findings align with theological doctrines in Islam, which traditionally condemn homosexual behavior as morally unacceptable. In Pakistan, where religion significantly influences law, education, and public discourse, this result is particularly expected and affirms the cultural embeddedness of religious dogma in shaping individual moral values.

The significant negative correlation ($r = -.49$) and predictive strength ($\beta = -0.48$) of religiosity illustrate how deeply religious socialization may entrench heteronormative values in the youth population. This observation is consistent with findings from Muslim-majority countries, where religious injunctions and collective identity reinforce traditional moral positions (Röder, 2015; Yacoub, 2015).

Spirituality as a Weaker Predictor

Interestingly, spirituality showed a weak positive correlation with attitudes toward homosexuality but was not a significant predictor in the regression model. This finding supports earlier observations by Castaneda (2019) and Lomash et al. (2019) that while religiosity often reflects structured dogma, spirituality is more individualistic and fluid. The weak positive relationship may indicate that spiritually inclined youth are more open to diverse existential perspectives, even if these are not fully endorsed in their doctrinal faith traditions.

This discrepancy between religiosity and spirituality highlights the need to differentiate between structured belief systems and personal existential reflections in studies of moral and social attitudes. It also implies that interventions aimed at increasing tolerance should consider fostering spiritual reflection as a potential avenue for broader acceptance.

Gender and Marital Status Differences

Current findings showed significant differences in attitudes based on gender and marital status. Females and unmarried participants

exhibited more favorable understandings toward homosexuality than males and married individuals. These findings are in line with the previous literature that men are usually less accepting of homosexuality than women (Gutierrez, 2021; Ting et al., 2016). In male-dominating cultures like Pakistan, men's identity is often allied with unyielding roles of masculinity and social conformity, which easily explain these gendered differences.

It was also found that unmarried participants have higher tolerance and reflect generational shifts in customs or lesser exposure to familial and societal values that traditionally emphasize conformity to religious norms. As mentioned by Pew Research Center (2013), fresher and unmarried people manage to express more liberal views globally, and this can also be seen in the Pakistani context.

Study Implications

The outcomes have salient implications for mental health professionals, teachers, and community leaders associated with Pakistani youth. It has been dominantly stated that religiosity is a prominent factor of anti-homosexual attitudes, allowing professionals to design culturally adaptive interventions. Programs fostering intergroup dialogue and inclusive education can challenge misconceptions while respecting religious identity.

Furthermore, incorporating aspects of spirituality, such as empathy, introspection, and moral reflection, into youth development programs may promote more nuanced discussions about sexuality. Given the complexity and sensitivity surrounding this topic, especially in Muslim-majority contexts, change efforts must be gradual, evidence-based, and rooted in culturally appropriate practices.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has a few limitations. First, a cross-sectional design excludes causal interpretations. Second, the sample was limited to urban youth with internet access, potentially excluding more conservative rural populations. Third, self-report measures may be subject to social desirability bias, especially on sensitive topics.

Future research should explore the longitudinal impact of religious education and spiritual development on changing attitudes.

Qualitative investigations could also uncover the lived experiences of LGBTQ youth navigating faith and identity in conservative societies.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that religiosity plays a central role in shaping attitudes toward homosexuality among Muslim youth in Pakistan, while spirituality appears to be a weaker but potentially positive influence. Gender and marital status also significantly affect these attitudes. The findings call for informed, context-sensitive strategies to promote inclusivity and understanding among young people in culturally and religiously conservative societies like Pakistan.

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