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THE ROLE OF DOGMATISM IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between dogmatism and extremist tendencies among students of District Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Dogmatic thinking, characterized by rigid and intolerant beliefs, is hypothesized to contribute to the development of extremist ideologies. Using a quantitative approach, this research investigates the correlation between dogmatism and extremist tendencies among a sample of students. The findings reveal a positive relationship between dogmatism and extremist tendencies, suggesting that dogmatic intolerance can foster an environment conducive to extremist ideologies. Moreover, this study highlights the importance of addressing dogmatic thinking among students to prevent the spread of extremist tendencies and promote inclusive and tolerant worldviews. In conclusion, this study underscores the critical need for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals to address dogmatic thinking and promote inclusive values among students, thereby preventing the spread of extremist tendencies.

Keywords: Dogmatism, Violent Extremism, Intolerant Beliefs, Policymakers, Extremist Ideologies

Introduction

Societies plagued by various forms of extremism are more vulnerable to experiencing profound emotional, behavioral, and psychological distress (Jensen, Seate, & James, 2020). Multiple types of extremism, including domestic, political, and religious extremism, frequently escalate into violence and terrorism. Violent extremists exhibit antisocial behaviors, such as suicide bombings, dehumanization, and targeted assassinations of individuals with opposing views (Atoi, 2022). As defined by Schmidt (2014), extremism involves the use of physical force to suppress others' human and civil rights, imposing one's own beliefs, values, and ideologies.

Extremism is characterized by two key elements: the use of coercion to impose one's beliefs, principles, and ideologies on others, and the employment of violence and bias

to violate the human and civil rights of minorities and other individuals. Extremism violates social norms, particularly in the realms of religion and politics. While some extremists engage in violent acts, others may hold radical views without resorting to violence. Research suggests that both men and women join extremist groups for similar motivations, including political, social, or economic factors (O'Rourke, 2009; Pearson et al., 2020). However, some studies propose that gender-specific factors, such as social connections for women and risk-taking behavior for men, also contribute to this phenomenon (Sjoberg & Gentry, 2016).

Since extremists exhibit shallow emotions, lack of empathy and antisocial behaviour, they also exhibit cognitive rigidity (Duspara & Greitemeyer, 2017). Cognitive complexity can render individuals more susceptible to extremism, leading them to rigidly adhere to their ideology while dismissing or disregarding alternative perspectives. Theories of extremism laid emphasis on the complex cognitive processes that direct people towards extremism (Jensen, Seate & James, 2020) as it plays a key role in the emergence of extremism.

The concept of cognitive complexity was first explored by Rokeach (1954) in his work on dogmatism, which involves a set of beliefs about reality that foster intolerance. Individuals with closed minds tend to resist adopting new beliefs and adapting to novel situations. As recent literature proposed, "dogmatism refers to the tendency to hold rigid beliefs and principles as absolute, without considering contradictory evidence or the opinions of others" (Schulz et al., 2020; Toner et al., 2013). Dogmatic intolerance extends to suppressing free speech and violating socially established norms (Proojen and Krouwel, 2017). Individuals holding extreme dogmatic beliefs and ideological biases often exhibit psychological rigidity, rendering them more susceptible to extremist ideologies (Zmigrod, 2020). Moreover, research by Proojen and Krouwel (2015) suggests that dogmatic intolerance contributes to the development of extremism.

Recent incidents in Pakistan higher educational institutions have highlighted trend of violent tendencies and extremism among students. A notable example is the 2017 murder case of Mashal Khan, a student at Bacha Khan University in Charsadda, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. A mob primarily comprising of university students and instigated by some non-academic staff, attacked Khan, accusing him of blasphemous content on Facebook (Ahmad, 2019). University graduates in Pakistan have also been linked to violent extremism beyond campus boundaries. A notable case is that of Saad Aziz, an alumnus of the prestigious Institute of Business Administration in Karachi, who was discovered to be operating an Al-Qaeda sleeper cell in the city. Aziz was involved in the targeted killings of minority group members and low-ranking security personnel (Sahoutara, 2019). Despite, university students in Pakistan are increasingly being

recruited by Islamist groups for jihad and campus clashes between student groups are on the rise, there is lack of empirical research exploring the extent to which university students are exposed to radical ideological literature (Ahmad & Jafri, 2020).

Existing research underscores the importance of early detection and intervention to counter dogmatic ideologies and extremist behaviors among students. By redirecting students towards inclusive and positive worldviews, this proactive approach will not only benefit society by preventing potential harm but also safeguard the well-being and future prospects of the students themselves.

Theoretical Framework:

Social Identity Theory suggests that individuals derive a sense of identity and belonging from their group memberships. Dogmatic individuals may be motivated to maintain a positive self-image and protect their group's status by rejecting opposing views and maintaining a rigid adherence to their group's ideology (Tajfel & Turner's, 1979).

Objectives and Hypotheses:

- To examine the relationship between violent extremism and dogmatism
- To assess the role of dogmatism in the development of violent extremism among students.
- To assess the prevalence of violent extremism across different educational levels.

Hypotheses are as follows:

- H1: Positive correlation exists between violent extremism and dogmatism
- H2: Dogmatism has a positive effect on the development of violent extremism
- H3: College students exhibit more extremist tendencies as compared to school and university students

Method:

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling from various schools, colleges, and universities of Peshawar. The sample comprised of (N=600) students evenly divided among different educational levels. Prior permission was obtained from the concerned institutional authorities. Informed consent was ensured, ensuring confidentiality and the exclusive use of collected data for research purposes. Participation was voluntary, and participants could withdraw at any time. Participants were briefed on the study's purpose, and the booklet including Demographic sheet, The Extremism and Violence Risk Identification Scale (EVRIS; Hassan, Khattaq, Qureshi & Iqbal, 2021) and Dogmatism (DS; Shearman, 2010) was distributed. The participants completed the booklet, and the data was collected for analysis.

Results:**Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties of extremism and dogmatism scales (n=597)**

Scale	Items	M	SD	α	Skew	Kurt	Range	
							Actual	Potential
Extremism	26	100.31	17.94	.78	-.175	.219	36-131	5-130
Dogmatism	23	49.42	5.34	.85	.003	-.034	36-68	23-115

In Table 1, The Extremism scale demonstrated satisfactory reliability ($\alpha = 0.78$) and a nearly normal distribution (skewness = -0.175, kurtosis = 0.219). The mean score was 100.31 (SD = 17.94), with actual scores ranging from 36 to 131, closely approximating the potential range of 5 to 130.

The Dogmatism scale, comprising 23 items, demonstrated excellent reliability ($\alpha = 0.85$) and a nearly normal distribution (skewness = 0.003, kurtosis = -0.034). The mean score was 49.42, with a standard deviation of 5.34. Although the actual score range (36-68) was narrower than the theoretical range (23-115), the scale showed robust psychometric properties. Hence, all scales showed acceptable reliability.

Table 2 Correlation between Dogmatism and Extremism among students (N=597)

Variables	M	SD	1	2
Dogmatism	49.42	5.34	-	
Violent Extremism	100.31	17.94	.11**	-

Table 2 presents the correlation coefficients between dogmatism and violent extremism. The results indicated a positive correlation between dogmatism and extremism ($r = 0.11$, $p < 0.01$). Although the relationship is not strong, however it suggests a potential association between dogmatism and violent extremism among students. Consequently, students holding dogmatic beliefs are more likely to engage in extremist acts.

Table 3 Regression coefficient of Dogmatism on Extremism among students (N=597)

Variables	B	B	SE
Constant	81.2***		7.1
Dogmatism	.254***	.110	.09
R²	.012		

Note, N=597

*** $p < 001$

The regression analysis results presented in Table 3 examine the impact of dogmatism on extremism among students. The model explained small proportion of variance in extremism, with an R-squared value of 0.012. Hence, the predictor variable explained 1.2% variance in the outcome variable with ($F = 7.2, p < .001$). However, the Durbin-Watson statistic ($DW = 1.88$) revealed a positive autocorrelation, as it fell below the standard value of 2. Despite this, the coefficient analysis showed a positive relationship between dogmatism and extremism, with a beta coefficient ($\beta = .110, p < .001$). The standard error ($SE = 0.09$), B-value ($B = .254$) confirmed the significance of the coefficient. Overall, the results indicate that although weak, however, dogmatism had a positive impact on violent extremism among student population.

Table 4 Means, Standard Deviations, and One-Way Analyses of Variance in Extremism and Dogmatism across educational level (n=597)

Variables	School (n=201)		College (n=194)		University (n=202)		F (2,594)
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	
Extremism	98.95	19.35	101.80	17.21	98.95	19.35	1.25
Dogmatism	49.79	5.95	49.60	5.08	49.79	5.95	1.56

Note. M=Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

A comparison of psychological variables across different education levels (school, college, and university) revealed minimal differences. Means and standard deviations for extremism were similar across groups, with college participants ($M = 101.80, SD = 17.21$) scoring slightly higher than school and university participants ($M = 98.95, SD = 19.35$). However, one-way ANOVA results indicated no statistically significant differences ($F = 1.25, p > .05$). Similarly, Dogmatism showed minimal variation across education groups, with mean scores ranging from 49.60 (college) to 49.79 (school and university), and no significant differences were detected ($F = 1.56, p > .05$).

Discussion:

The demographic profile of the study participants shows a young, educated, and predominantly urban demographic, aligning with trends found in similar research conducted in developing regions. The age distribution was skewed towards young adults, with 36.2% between 18-20 years old and 34.2% between 21-28 years old. The gender distribution was balanced, with a near-equal split between males (49.2%) and females (50.8%). The balanced gender representation in this study is consistent with previous research (Kessler et al., 2005), which emphasizes the value of including both males and females in psychosocial investigations to ensure a comprehensive understanding of diverse viewpoints and experiences. The overall Extremism scale demonstrates acceptable reliability ($\alpha = .78$) The Dogmatism scale exhibits high reliability ($\alpha = .85$), showing consistency with previous studies, notably Rokeach's

(1960) influential work, which demonstrated the scale's strength across various contexts.

It was assumed that dogmatism would have positive relationship with extremism that reflect that student with rigid thinking patterns are more likely to engage in violent extremist activities without considering the painful outcomes created by it. The hypothesis was accepted and positive correlation ($r = .11$, $p = < .01$) was found between both variables. Although the correlation coefficient indicates a relatively weak positive relationship between extremism and dogmatism, it is essential to acknowledge that even modest correlations can be meaningful in the context of complex social phenomena. The presence of a positive correlation, although small, suggests that there may be a subtle yet significant link between these two variables. This finding is consistent with theoretical expectations as dogmatic thinking can contribute to the development and maintenance of extremist attitudes (Zmigrod, Rentfrow & Robbins, 2019; Zmigrod, 2022).

The current study confirmed the presence of violent extremist tendencies among students particularly college students, as hypothesized. These findings align with previous researches (Ahmad & Jafri, 2020; Sahoutara, 2019), highlighting the ongoing concern of extremism within this student population.

Conclusion

This study investigated the significant relationship between dogmatism and violent extremism, specifically examining how dogmatic intolerance can foster extremist tendencies and increase the likelihood of terrorist acts. The findings revealed a positive correlation between these variables. While existing research has primarily focused on the general population, this study aimed to fill a knowledge gap by exploring this relationship among students. Specifically, the study targeted three educational groups - school, college, and university students to gain a deeper understanding of how extremism develops and to identify early warning signs, ultimately safeguarding students against its influence.

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