

Role of Social Connectedness and Self-Compassion in Fostering Tolerance for Disagreement among Madrassah Students

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In the Pakistani social setup, students enrolled in madrassahs are deemed to be a dysfunctional part of the society. This study investigated the relationship between social connectedness and self-compassion with tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students. The study also hypothesized that social connectedness and self-compassion were likely to be predictors of tolerance among madrassah students. Moreover, there would likely be a gender difference in social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students. A purposive sample of 250 madrassah students between the ages of 19 and 25 years was taken from four registered madrassahs in Lahore. The correlation analysis revealed that social connectedness had a significant positive correlation with isolation and over-identification dimensions of self-compassion. Hierarchical regression analysis showed that gender negatively predicted tolerance, whereas residential status and isolation subscale of self-compassion significantly positively predicted the tolerance for disagreement. Moreover, a *t*-test revealed that male madrassah students harbored higher tolerance for disagreements than females. This study has important implications for the fields of Islamic Psychology and Social Psychology.

Keywords

social connectedness • self-compassion • tolerance for disagreement • madrassah students

Social Connectedness, Self-Compassion, and Tolerance for Disagreement among Madrassah Students

To gain insight into the psychological world of madrassah students, it is crucial to gain an understanding of their social world. An important component of the social world is connectedness. Social connectedness refers to connecting with others and forms the basis of different

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societal relationships. People who are socially connected feel closer to other people and tend to share experiences with others. These people take part in discussions, congregations, and activities, thus promoting cordiality and collegiality within them. On the other hand, people who interact minimally with others often confront negative emotions (Daniel, 2009). Zaidi, Nadeem, and Rehman (2016) studied the perception and practices of social behaviors among madrassah students. The major findings revealed that madrassah students remained tolerant toward their social criticism. The majority of madrassah students disagreed with the statement that they do not give respect to other's opinions. The students also showed compassion and helped others in times of difficulty. Ahmed (2008) investigated whether religious people are more prosocial. It was found that highly religious people tend to show more compassion and exhibit the role of a helper in social interactions, thereby providing economic support to others as well. They cared for what the others said and maintained peace and harmony in these interactions, which negates the previous view of madrassah students as being aggressive.

Social connectedness and self-compassion share similar features as both emphasize the importance of interconnectedness. Seppala, Rossomando, and Doty (2013) examined the relationship between social connection and compassion. Their research found that social connectedness is a fundamental human need closely linked to self-compassion. People often feel a deep sense of joy and fulfillment when helping others and witnessing others being helped. Fahmi (2018) also carried out a descriptive study to examine social attitude and self-compassion among students of DarulMa'rifat revealing a positive correlation between the two variables. They exercised a good social attitude, such as tolerance, inclusiveness, cohesiveness, and cooperation with others. The three most common facets of self-compassion are self-kindness, common humanity, and mindfulness. Self-kindness entails being kind when viewing one's shortcomings and evaluating them with benevolence. Mindfulness helps manage one's negative reactions and replaces them with consideration. When the emotions are balanced, people are better able to reflect and view the situation holistically rather than fixating on certain parts. As a result, the individual's self-awareness expands (Neff, Hsieh, & Dejitterat, 2005).

The concept of tolerance for disagreement came from the researcher's efforts to differentiate between healthy and unhealthy conflict, which is defined as an individual's ability to tolerate the opinions and behaviors of others that contradict with that individual's beliefs (Teven, 2015). Richmond and McCroskey (2010) viewed the unhealthy conflict as involving enmity, negative emotions, and suspiciousness. On the other hand, healthy conflict was shown to lead to a greater sense of self and personal growth. The research demonstrated that self-compassionate individuals may be able to handle difficult interpersonal conflicts more than others. Individuals who possess more self-compassion tend to be less self-critical than others when experiencing negative interpersonal interactions and are more tolerant of disagreements (Bloch, 2018).

Being Muslims, a considerable number of Pakistanis want their children to get an Islamic education, and there is an insignificant amount of people looking for both religious and modern non-religious courses in education. There are five boards or *wafaqs* in Pakistan that are based on these religious sects: Wafaqul-Madaaris Arabia of Deobandi, Tanzeemul-maddaris of Bareilly, Wafaqul-maddaris Salafia, Wafaqul-maddaris Shia, and Maddaris Rabitaul (Nisar, 2010). Fayyaz (2004) stated that madrassahs provide the opportunity to fortify tolerance for religious disagreements. The level of brutality against society was significantly lower among these students. They do not violate their norms within society. They also engaged in helping behavior, showed kindness toward others in need, and followed Islamic ideals strictly, such as compassion and forgiveness.

Madrassah students have often been stigmatized as violent and aggressive, which reinforces the notion of extremism. As a result, madrassahs are portrayed in an unflattering light. However, the role of madrassahs cannot be overlooked. Prior studies have extensively examined negative

traits associated with madrassah students, such as aggression, self-concealment, and egocentrism, leading to predictable results. However, these studies do not consider the positive aspects of an individual to test the outcome variable. Therefore, this study aims to highlight the positive aspects of madrassah students.

Theoretical Framework

Social Mentality Theory

According to Gilbert's (2000) theory of social mentality, people identify with themselves through frameworks initially developed for identifying with others. A social mentality enables a person to perceive others as acting cordially. This theory can be applied as an underpinning to the current research that when a person wants to relate with others to gain acceptance, the chance for disagreement also decreases as one begins to scrutinize oneself in the reflection of others.

Optimal Distinctiveness Theory

Brewer's (1991) theory of optimal distinctiveness postulates that individuals tend to identify with their groups, feeling a sense of belonging. This belonging is achieved through inclusion, which specifies that a person recognizes themselves as part of the group.

Self-Determination Theory

The theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (2000) suggests that every individual is influenced by the need to seek satisfaction from their social environment while simultaneously reacting to various aspects of the environment that either encourage or discourage their needs. This interaction helps regulate one's behavior within that context and also influences the behavior of others.

Rationale of the Study

Madrassah students have often been stigmatized as violent and aggressive; which further reinforces the notion of extremism. As a result, madrassahs are portrayed in an unflattering light. However, the role of madrassahs cannot be overlooked. They are providing social opportunities to students with limited resources. Madrassahs are also helping break the stereotype that madrassah students are more anti-social, self-centered, and intolerant. To the best of the researcher's knowledge, no study has been conducted so far on this topic. A comprehensive review of the literature revealed that prior studies primarily focused on the negative aspects of madrassah students, such as aggression, self-concealment, and egocentrism, which have elicited predictable results. However, these studies have not examined the positive aspects of madrassah students.

Objectives

- Analyze the relationship between social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students
- Determine whether social connectedness and self-compassion are predictors of tolerance for disagreements.

- Explore the gender differences in social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students.

Hypotheses

- There will be a significant relationship between social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students.
- Social connectedness and self-compassion will likely be the predictors of tolerance for disagreement.
- There will be gender difference in social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement.

Method

Sample

The present study used a correlational design to determine the relationship between social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students (Kapoor & Saigal, 2013). A purposive sampling strategy was used to recruit 250 madrassah students (male = 125; female = 125) aged 19–25 years ($M_{age} = 21.68$; $SD = 1.73$) from four different madrassahs in Lahore.

The inclusion and exclusion criteria are given below:

- Inclusion criteria: Students who understood Urdu were included in the study. Participants were selected from madrassahs affiliated with Wafaqul-maddaris and Tanzeemul-maddaris, which organized based on sects.
- Exclusion criteria: Private candidates and students on leave were excluded from the sample. Additionally, students suffering from any physical or psychological problem were not included.

Measures

Social Connectedness Scale-Revised (SCS-R)

The Urdu version of SCS-R (Farooq & Najam, 2013) was used and consisted of 20 items. It was measured on a 6-point Likert scale. The social connectedness scale has an internal consistency of .92–.94. The following items were reverse-scored: 3, 6, 7, 9, 11, 13, 15, 17, 18, and 20. The Cronbach alpha for the SCS-R is .94 (Lee & Robbins, 2000). The test-retest reliability from English to Urdu is .78.

Self-Compassion Scale (SCS)

An Urdu version of Neff's (2003) Scale, translated by Shaukat, Zafar, and Kausar in 2015, consists of 26 items. A 5-point Likert scale was used to give response selection choices, where '1' was 'strongly disagree' and '5' was 'strongly agree.' Additionally, the items on the negative subscales were reverse-coded and comprised of the following six subscales:

1. Self-kindness: The ability to be kind when viewing one's short-comings and evaluating them with benevolence
2. Self-judgment: This is the act of berating and criticizing oneself
3. Common humanity: Viewing one's experience as a part of the global perspective
4. Isolation: This refers to egocentric fallacy or feeling isolated in one's experiences
5. Mindfulness: This helps mitigate negative reactions
6. Overidentification: Identifying too closely to one's group.

The reliability coefficients for these subscales were .65, .56, .76, .59, .75, and .54, respectively.

Tolerance for Disagreement (TFD)

An Urdu version of McCroskey's (2008) Scale, translated by Naeem and Kausar (2013), consisted of 15 items. A 5-point Likert scale was used, where '1' was 'strongly disagree' and '5' was 'strongly agree.' The following negative scale items were reverse-coded: 3, 4, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13. The Cronbach alpha for the TFD was .85.

Procedure

The research procedure consisted of several key steps. Initially, the original authors granted permission to use the measuring instruments for the study. Permission was sought from the translating authors of the respective tools. Institutional permission was taken from the relevant authorities. After they granted permission, data was collected from Jamia Ashrafia ($n = 75$), Darul Uloom Naeemia ($n = 50$), Madrassa Faisal Lil Banat ($n = 75$), and Jamia Sirajia Naeemia ($n = 50$). The participants were informed of the aims and objectives of the study. Only willing participants were selected for the study. Participants gave their consent and were supplied with proper instructions. Participants were requested to respond to all the items. Of the 256 questionnaires given, 250 were completed and returned. Upon review, these questionnaires were selected due to their completion and because they met the set criteria for sample homogeneity. Therefore, the response rate recorded was 97%. On average, the administration took 40 minutes. All ethical considerations were followed, including the assurance of confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the identity of the madrassah students. Analyses were run on SPSS, minimizing potential researcher biases.

Ethical Considerations

The research proposal was approved by the Kinnaird College Ethical Review Committee. Permission to use the scales was received from the original and translating authors before conducting the research. We also gained permission from the principals of the madrassahs. We received consent from each participant and confirmed that their information would be used only for research and academic purposes. All ethical concerns were considered, including the assurance of confidentiality of the data and anonymity of the madrassah students' identities.

Results

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement. Multiple regression

analysis was applied to check the predictors of tolerance for disagreement, and an independent sample *t*-test was used to find out the gender differences.

According to table 2, social connectedness has significant positive and moderate

Table 1 shows the relationship between social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement in madrassah students. Social connectedness had a significant positive and moderate relationship with the isolation subscale for self-compassion. This suggests that madrassah students who had a stronger connection with their group interacted less with others who did not belong to their group, contributing to isolation. Similarly, it had a significant positive and moderate relationship with over-identification. When madrassah students identify themselves with their group, they also tend to view their weaknesses as a part of the larger group. Isolation had a significant positive and weak correlation with tolerance for disagreement, indicating that madrassah students who avoid social interactions where disagreements may occur are more likely to develop a greater tolerance toward disagreements as they are not often directly involved in them. These students can deal with conflicts in a more manageable way.

Table 2 shows a multiple hierarchical linear regression was conducted to predict tolerance for disagreement in madrassah students based on social connectedness and self-compassion. In model 1, gender and student residential status were entered as control variables as these had a significant negative and positive correlation with the outcome variable, respectively. In model 2, social connectedness was entered as a predictor. In model 3, six dimensions of self-compassion were entered as predictors. The Durbin Watson test was used to test the assumption for independence of errors, and the value (1.61) was within the range of 1–3, exhibiting that the assumption was met. Another assumption for no perfect multicollinearity was assessed by determining the tolerance value, which was above .2, thus meeting the criteria.

In the first model, the control variables for tolerance for disagreement, such as gender and a student's residential status, were entered, and a significant regression equation was found ($R^2 = .06$, $F(2, 247) = 7.65$, $p < .01$). In model 2, social connectedness was added along with the effect of gender and the student's residential status, and the model was still significant ($R^2 = .06$, $F(3, 246) = 5.30$, $p < .01$). When the effect of model 1 was excluded from model 2, the regression

Table 1. Intercorrelation among Social Connectedness, Self-compassion, and Tolerance for Disagreement in Madrassah Students (N = 250).

Variable	SC	SK	SJ	CH	IS	MFN	OI	TFD	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. SC	1	.01	.07	-.04	.38***	.02	.29***	.05	4.40	.57
2. SK		1	-.21**	.45***	-.10	.54***	-.15*	.10	3.78	.88
3. SJ			1	-.17**	.38***	-.33***	.26***	-.05	2.45	.78
4. CH				1	-.17**	.45***	-.11	.06	3.72	1.00
5. IS					1	-.20**	.48***	.16*	2.69	.87
6. MFN						1	-.16**	.07	3.87	.79
7. OI							1	.12	2.64	.81
8. TFD								1	2.52	.64

Note. N = 250; SC = social connectedness; SK = self-kindness; SJ = self-judgement; CH = common humanity; IS = isolation; MFN = mindfulness; OI = overidentification; TFD = tolerance for disagreement. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$. *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 2. Multiple Hierarchical Linear Regression Showing Predictors of Tolerance for Disagreement.

Predictors	Tolerance for Disagreement $\Delta R^2 \beta$	
Model 1	.06**	
Gender		-.17**
Residential status		.14*
Model 2	.00	
Social connectedness	.04	-.04
Model 3		.04
Self-kindness		-.09
Self-judgment		.06
Common humanity		.19*
Isolation		-.02
Mindfulness		.07
Overidentification		
Total R ²	.10**	

Note. ΔR^2 = R square change value; β : standardized beta; Total R²: sum of R²; gender was coded as 0 = male and 1 = female, residential status was coded as 0 = boarder and 1 = non-boarder. * $p < 0.05$. ** $p < 0.01$.

equation was non-significant ($\Delta R^2 = .00$, $F(1, 246) = .63$, $p = .43$). In model 3, gender, student's residential status, social connectedness, and the six dimensions of self-compassion were added, and the regression equation was significant ($R^2 = .10$, $F(9, 240) = 3.08$, $p < .01$). When the effect of model 1 and model 2 was excluded from model 3, the regression equation was non-significant ($\Delta R^2 = .04$, $F(6, 240) = 1.92$, $p = .08$).

Among predictors, gender emerged as a significant negative predictor of tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students. Male madrassah students were found to show a higher tolerance of diverse opinions. TFD is positively predicted by the student's residential status. Non-boarder madrassah students were found to be more agreeable and avoided disagreements to a greater extent. The isolation subscale for self-compassion also emerged as a significant positive predictor of tolerance for disagreement, which implies that questioning one's suffering decreased the tendency to disagree with others and increased tolerance.

Table 3 indicates significant gender differences in madrassah students regarding the study variables. Significant gender differences were found in self-kindness, self-judgment, mindfulness, and TFD. Male madrassah students harbored more kindness toward themselves ($M = 3.96$, $SD = .73$) than female madrassah students ($M = 3.60$, $SD = .98$). Female madrassah students judged themselves more strictly ($M = 2.57$, $SD = .83$) compared to males ($M = 2.32$, $SD = .71$). Male madrassah students tended to engage in mindfulness more ($M = 4.13$, $SD = .65$) than the female students ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .83$). Male madrassah students tended to show more tolerance for disagreements ($M = 2.64$, $SD = .61$) than female madrassah students ($M = 2.40$, $SD = .65$).

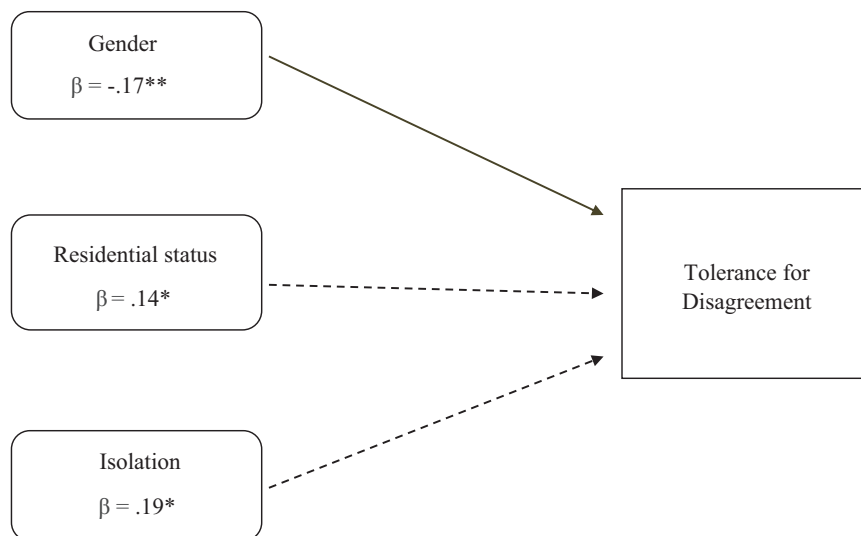
Emergед Model

Figure 1. Standardized Regression coefficients for the predictors of Tolerance for Disagreement in Madrassah Students.

Table 3. Independent Samples T-test Showing Gender Differences in Social Connectedness, Self-compassion and Tolerance for Disagreement among Madrassah Students (N = 250).

Variables	Males		Females		<i>t</i> (df)	<i>p</i>	95% CI		Cohen's <i>d</i>
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>			<i>LL</i>	<i>UL</i>	
SC	4.39	.54	4.40	.60	-.13(248)	.89	-.15	.13	.02
SK	3.96	.73	3.60	.98	3.32(229.03)	.00	.15	.58	.42
SJ	2.32	.71	2.57	.83	-2.55(242.26)	.01	-.44	-.06	.32
CH	3.78	.88	3.65	1.11	1.05(235.52)	.29	-.12	.38	.13
IS	2.63	.77	2.76	.97	-1.17(236.32)	.24	-.35	.08	.15
MFN	4.13	.65	3.62	.83	5.43(234.28)	.00	.33	.70	.68
OI	2.65	.78	2.63	.84	0.20(248)	.85	-.18	.22	.02
TFD	2.64	.61	2.40	.65	3.03(248)	.00	.08	.40	.38

Note. **p* < 0.05; SC: social connectedness; SK: self-kindness; SJ: self-judgment, CH: common humanity; IS: isolation, MFN: mindfulness; OI: over-identification; TFD: tolerance for disagreement. CI = confidence interval; *LL* = lower limit; *UL* = upper limit.

Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the relationship between social connectedness, self-compassion, and tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students. It also determined the predictors of tolerance for disagreement. Additionally, gender variance was checked in all study variables.

The literature revealed that social connectedness and tolerance for disagreement are positively correlated. Social connectedness was also revealed to have a high correlation with the

level of self-compassion. However, the results demonstrated that there was no significant relationship between social connectedness and tolerance for disagreement. Isolation (the subscale of self-compassion) had a significant positive relationship with TFD. This positive relationship could be due to the individual's reluctance to involve themselves in a conflict. By shunning social interactions and remaining isolated and confined, these students may have enhanced their degree of tolerance toward opposing views. These findings are in line with previous research conducted (Spielmann, MacDonald, & Tackett, 2012).

Madrassah students who had a stronger connection with their group interacted less with others who did not belong to their group, which could lead to isolation. This idea is consistent with Williams and Galliher (2010), who studied and concluded that social connectedness does not necessarily involve human interaction, but rather an internalized feeling of being connected with others. Their identities are fused with those of others who belong to this institution. Previous research also suggests that the process of socialization shapes the identity of being a part of a group (Jafari, Krauss, & Suandi, 2015).

Male madrassah students were expected to have more tolerance than female ones. One can argue that female madrassah students tend to be less tolerant toward views that oppose theirs and focus on their own needs. This finding is in line with previous research conducted with madrassah students (Naeem and Kausar, 2013) in which they found that gender plays a pivotal role in predicting tolerance for disagreement.

Whether a student was a boarder or a non-boarder contributed to how tolerant they were toward opposing views. Non-boarder students were more agreeable and avoided disagreements to a greater extent. Perveen and Kazmi (2011) also found that non-boarder madrassah students were more flexible and tolerant compared to boarders.

Isolation acts as a positive buffer for disagreements, which mitigates the effect by enhancing the tolerance levels of madrassah students. They do not want to harm their relationships by becoming involved in a conflict, thus resorting to isolation. In this premise, madrassah students developed internal frameworks and showed compassion by caring for what others said because it aligned with their views. Thus, the students maintained peace and harmony in these interactions and avoided any discrepancies, thereby evading disagreements.

Male madrassah students harbored more kindness toward themselves compared to females. As male students constitute a vulnerable group and face more challenges in the madrassah environment, they adopt self-kindness as a mechanism for organization. Research suggests that males have a higher tendency to show self-kindness than females (Yarnell, Neff, & Davidson, 2018). The difference also lies in self-judgment. Females judge themselves more harshly than male madrassah students. If results are interpreted in a cultural context, it is believed that females are more judgmental of themselves and engage more in fault-finding than males. A meta-analysis by Yarnell, Stafford, Neff, Reilly, Knox, and Mullarkey (2015) also indicated similar results. Male madrassah students also tend to engage in mindfulness more than female ones. The male students are expected to stay calm and elicit more positive emotions. Moreover, male madrassah students are more approving of their thinking and therefore show a higher propensity to view the problem holistically. An earlier study by Leary and colleagues (2007) also supported this finding that males are more mindful of their thoughts.

In addition, male madrassah students also have a higher tolerance for disagreements than females. Male students give considerable respect to diverse opinions, thereby viewing the situation constructively rather than fixating on trivial matters. There is empirical evidence that supports our finding that males have higher TFD than females (Nauman, 2017).

Limitations and Suggestions

The scales used in this study were translated, so we suggest the use of indigenous tools for future research. The sample was specific to the madrassahs of Lahore city only. We recommend that other cities be included in future validation studies to acquire a larger, more representative sample of madrassah students. Other factors could be considered in further research, such as self-efficacy, conflict styles, emotional empathy, and coping strategies, which can be related to tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students.

Implications

This research has implications for conventional madrassah authorities to provide opportunities for socialization to optimize the level of tolerance among them. This study provides insight into the role of social connectedness in influencing self-compassion and tolerance for disagreement in madrassah students. In addition, it can provide social and psychological researchers and students with the features of attitudes and behaviors among madrassah students that need to be researched further. This study will also create awareness among society regarding madrassah students and their psychological needs.

Conclusion

Overall, the study found no significant relationship between social connectedness and tolerance for disagreement. Social connectedness harbored a significant positive correlation with isolation and over-identification dimensions of self-compassion. Isolation correlated positively with tolerance for disagreement among madrassah students. Gender, residential status, and isolation appeared as significant predictors of TFD. Male madrassah students possessed a higher tolerance for disagreements than females.

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