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TITLE: Religiosity, Spirituality, Forgiveness, Religious Coping as Predictors of Life Satisfaction and Generalized Anxiety: A Quantitative Study on Turkish Muslim University Students

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PAGES: 47-58

ORIGINAL PDF URL: <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/1639702>



Religiosity, Spirituality, Forgiveness, Religious Coping as Predictors of Life Satisfaction and Generalized Anxiety: A Quantitative Study on Turkish Muslim University Students

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Abstract

During the last two decades, several studies have been carried out to examine the main predictors of life satisfaction and anxiety. This paper investigates the connection between spirituality, religiosity, religious coping, forgiveness, anxiety, and satisfaction with life in the case of a Turkish Muslim sample. In total 560 respondents were selected from different faculties of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University. 53.4% (N= 299) of the sample were females and 46.6% (N= 261) of them were males. Participants' age changed to between 18 and 38 years. 28.4% (N= 159) of students were from faculty of education, 25.9% (N= 145) of students were from faculty of architecture and engineering, 23.8% (N= 133) of students were from faculty of theology, and 22% (N= 123) of students were from faculty of administrative sciences and economics. In the present researchers utilised the "Forgiveness Scale", "Positive Religious Coping Scale", "Religious Struggles", "Scale for Satisfaction with Life" and "Generalised Anxiety Scale" to collect data. According to multiple regression findings, religiosity and forgiveness were significant predictors for life satisfaction. Moreover, forgiveness and religious coping (religious struggles and positive religious coping) were significant predictors of generalized anxiety.

Keywords:

Religiosity, Spirituality, Religious Coping, Religious Struggle, Forgiveness, Satisfaction with Life, Generalized Anxiety.

Hayat Memnuniyeti ve Kaygının Yordayıcıları Olarak Dindarlık, Maneviyat, Affetme ve Dini Başa Çıkma: Üniversite Öğrencileri Üzerine Nicel Bir Araştırma

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eISSN: 2458-9675

Received: 30.11.2020

Revision: 09.02.2021

Accepted: 12.02.2021

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Öz

Son çeyrek yüzyılda hayat memnuniyeti ve kaygının yordayıcısı olarak pek çok etmen üzerinde durulmuştur. Bu araştırma ise, dindarlık, maneviyat, dini başa çıkma, affetme, hayat memnuniyeti ve kaygı arasındaki ilişkiyi ele almaktadır. Araştırmaya Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal Üniversitesi'nin farklı fakültelerinde okuyan 560 öğrenci dâhil edilmiştir. Katılımcıların %53.4'ü (N= 299) kadın %46.6'sı (N= 261) erkektir. Katılımcıların yaşları 18 ila 38 arasında değişmektedir. Katılımcıların %28.4'ü (N= 159) eğitim, %25.9'u (N= 145) mimarlık ve mühendislik, % 23.8'i (N= 133) ilahiyat ve %22'si (N= 123) iktisadi ve idari bilimler fakültelerinde öğrencidir. Veriler "Affetme Ölçeği", "Olumlu Dini Başa Çıkma Ölçeği", "Olumsuz Dini Başa Çıkma Ölçeği", "Hayat Memnuniyeti Ölçeği" ve "Genel Kaygı Ölçeği" yardımıyla toplanmıştır. Regresyon analizlerinden elde edilen bulgular, dindarlık ve affetmenin hayat memnuniyetinde anlamlı yordayıcı olduklarını ortaya koymuştur. Ayrıca araştırmada affetmenin, olumlu ve olumsuz dini başa çıkmanın kaygı üzerinde anlamlı yordayıcı olduğu bulgulanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler:

Dindarlık, Maneviyat, Dini Başa Çıkma, Dini Didişme, Affetme, Hayat Memnuniyeti, Genel Kaygı.

Citation: Ayten, A., & Karagöz, S. (2021). Religiosity, spirituality, forgiveness, religious coping as predictors of life satisfaction and generalized anxiety: A quantitative study on Turkish Muslim university students. *Spiritual Psychology and Counseling*, 6(1), 47–58. <https://dx.doi.org/10.37898/spc.2021.6.1.130>

DOI: 10.37898/spc.2021.6.1.130



The focus of social scientists on the relationship between health indices and variables of religious orientation toward life, such as religiosity, virtues, and religious coping, have risen substantially during the last quarter of the century. Many studies investigating the links between mental health and the variables of religiousness, religious coping, and forgiveness had contributed to change social scientists' ideas about the relationship between religiosity and health, which were mainly negative in the first period of psychology especially until 1950s (Koenig, 2004: 15-30). Some of these studies indicated that the positive impacts of religiosity and spirituality on both physical and psychological health have emerged through virtues such as helping, humility, etc. These studies also showed the positive connection between religiosity, and positive religious activities like pleading, benevolent God reappraisal, prayer, etc (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). Some other studies showed that religiosity and religious coping and virtues do not have any positive contribution to health and even some studies found that religiosity or negative religious coping has increased the level of anxiety of individuals (Pargament et al., 2013). However, the larger majority of these studies on the relationship between religious coping, religiosity, spirituality, virtues (like forgiveness, gratitude, humility, etc.), and health and well-being has been done in the Judeo-Christian cultures (mainly in the USA) and mostly ignored people from other eastern religious cultures, Islam in particular. However, the number of studies examining Muslim behaviours concerning the link between religiosity and mental health has started to increase recently (Ayten & Korkmaz, 2019). These studies have started to provide explanations to the links between virtues, religiosity, spirituality, religious and spiritual coping, and both physical and psychological health in the Muslim countries.

This current research attempts to study the links between religiosity, spirituality, religious coping, forgiveness, life satisfaction, and generalized anxiety. The present study aims at contributing findings from Turkish-Muslim sample to literature concerning relations between psychological health and religious coping and forgiveness by examining the link between these variables (Ayten & Ferhan, 2016; Abu Raiya & Ayten, 2020). In the current study, the young generation is selected as a sample because their anxiety propensity is higher than other generations and life satisfaction level is less than the elder individuals (Aslan & Kaysadu, 2018; Özcan, Subaşı, Budak, Çelik, Gürel & Yıldız, 2013; Twenge, 2009; Twenge, 2018) in order to test the function of religiosity and religious coping on life satisfaction and anxiety.

The major aim of the study was to illustrate whether religiosity, spirituality, forgiveness, positive religious coping, and religious struggle are predictors of satisfaction with life and generalized anxiety. Based upon this question and the results of other studies we constructed the following hypotheses (H_{1-7}):

H₁: Religiosity will relate positively to life satisfaction (H_{1a}), and negatively to anxiety (H_{1b}).

H₂: Spirituality will relate positively to life satisfaction (H_{2a}), and negatively to anxiety (H_{2b}).

H₃: Forgiveness will relate positively to life satisfaction (H_{3a}), and negatively to anxiety (H_{3b}).

H₄: Religious struggle will relate negatively to life satisfaction (H_{4a}), and positively to anxiety (H_{4b}).

H₅: Positive religious coping will relate positively to life satisfaction (H_{5a}), and negatively to anxiety (H_{5b}).

H₆: Independent variables (religiosity, spirituality, forgiveness, positive religious coping, and religious struggle) will predict participants' levels of satisfaction with life.

H₇: Independent variables (religiosity, spirituality, forgiveness, positive religious coping, and religious struggle) will predict participants' levels of generalized anxiety.

Method

In the current study, correlational design was utilized as research model in order to reveal the links between spirituality, religiosity, religious coping and mental health indices such as life satisfaction and generalized anxiety.

Sample

The sample contains 560 Turkish Muslim undergraduates, enrolled in different colleges at Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University. Researchers utilised non-random snowball sampling to recruit the data. 53.4% ($N= 299$) of the sample are females and 46.6% ($N= 261$) of them are males. The age of participants has ranged from 18 to 38 years. 94.6% ($N=530$) of the sample are between 18-24 ages, and 5.4% ($N=30$) are between 25-38 ages. 28.4% ($N=159$) of students are from faculty of education, 25.9% ($N=145$) of students are from faculty of architecture and engineering, 23.8% ($N=133$) of students are from faculty of theology, and 22% ($N=123$) of students are from faculty of economics and administrative sciences.

Measurements

Demographic Variables Form. Three questions regarding age, faculty, and gender were asked to participants.

Religiosity and Spirituality. Self-rating scales were used to measure participants' religiosity and spirituality inclination levels. These two measures were as follows: (1). "How could you describe your level of religiosity? (Dindarlık düzeyinizi nasıl değerlendirirsiniz?" (2). "How could you describe your level of spirituality? (Maneviyat düzeyinizi nasıl değerlendiriyorsunuz?" For both two scales points are ranged from 1 (low) to 5 (high).

Forgiveness. The level of forgiveness inclination of students was measured by the *Interpersonal Forgiveness Scale* which has 18 items and three sub-dimensions. Aytan (2009) developed the scale and completed its reliability and validity analyses. Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin and Bartlett analyses displayed the fitness of data for factor analysis [$KMO = .88$; $\chi^2 = 1894.523$; $p = .000$]. In reliability analysis Cronbach's alpha coefficients of measure were found as acceptable: Forgiveness total $\alpha = .87$; "avoidance" $\alpha = .83$; "hopefulness" $\alpha = .74$ and "vengeance" $\alpha = .71$ (Aytan, 2009: 111-128). For the current survey, researchers directed a fresh reliability analysis and they found that Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the tool were satisfactory for the whole scale and sub-scales (Forgiveness $\alpha = .875$; "vengeance" $\alpha = .814$, "avoidance" $\alpha = .819$, and "hopefulness" $\alpha = .742$). Questions were organised in Likert format and each item ranged in point from 1 to 5.

Religious Coping. IPRC-Islamic Positive Religious Coping Scale was utilized for measuring respondents' inclination of religious coping (Abu-Raiya et al., 2008). The IPRC is composed of 7 items which are including different strategies for coping with adversities of daily life. Each item ranged in point from 1 to 4. Higher marks on this subscale reveal more positive religious coping. Researchers translated the measure to Turkish and completed its factor and reliability analyses [$KMO = .901$; $\chi^2 = 2.220$; $p = .000$; $\alpha = .88$].

Religious Struggles. Religious struggles were measured by the Islamic Religious Struggle Scale (see Abu-Raiya et al., 2008). The IRS has 6 items. Respondents were requested to designate the frequency by which they practiced the content of every item over the previous months on a 5-point scale ranging from 4 to 0. Higher scores on this subscale show more religious struggle. Researchers translated the scale to Turkish language and accomplished its validation and reliability analyses [$KMO = .897$; $\chi^2 = 2.617$; $p = .000$; $\alpha = .92$].

Life Satisfaction. In order to measure participants' life satisfaction discrepancy, the Satisfaction with Life Scale-SWLS was utilised (see Ed Diener et al., 1985). The SWLS is collected of 5 items. Each item ranged in point from 1 to 7. The measure was adopted to Turkish by Aytan (2012). In his survey findings of data reduction indicated that the scale is validated and reliable [$KMO = .81$; $\chi^2 = 323.367$; $p = .000$; $\alpha = .81$]. A new reliability analysis which has been done for current research displayed that Cronbach's coefficient was also satisfactory [$\alpha = .79$].

Anxiety. Participants' anxiety level was measured by The Generalized Anxiety Scale (see Spitzer et al., 2006) which is including 7 indications of anxiety (e.g., feeling edgy, worried, or nervous). Participants answered the items depending on their experience within the former two weeks. Answers of respondents were scaled from 0 to 3 and higher scores were accepted as a greater presence of anxiety. The researchers translated the measure to Turkish and they have found factor and reliability analysis were satisfactory. [$KMO = .889$; $\chi^2 = 1.634$; $p = .000$; Cronbach's coefficient $\alpha = .86$].

Procedure

Researchers collected from students who are studying in the different faculties of Bolu Abant İzzet Baysal University in Turkey between the date July and August 2018. Questionnaires containing “*Interpersonal Forgiveness Scale*”, “*Generalized Anxiety Scale-7*”, “*The Islamic Positive Religious Coping Scale*”, “*The Islamic Religious Struggle Scale*”, and “*The Satisfaction with Life Scale*” were distributed to students in schools. 4 pollsters helped researchers to finalise the survey. They gave information about the purposes of the study to the respondents and what their contribution would involve. Completion of the survey procured roughly 20 minutes based on unpaid contribution. The respondents did not refuse or reject the opportunity to respond to the survey. Generally, the students appear to have approached the research with zest and much interest.

Results

Correlational Analyses

Table 1 shows that the correlational coefficients (r) of the survey's central variables. Findings indicated that there are positive correlations between religiosity ($r = .119$; $p < .01$), forgiveness ($r = .095$; $p < .05$), positive religious coping ($r = .090$; $p < .05$), and satisfaction with life. These correlations were also statistically significant. Additionally, there was a significant negative correlation between religious struggles and satisfaction with life ($r = -.098$; $p < .05$). As for generalized anxiety, it is related negatively with forgiveness ($r = -.242$; $p < .01$), and positively with positive religious coping ($r = .118$; $p < .05$).

Table 1.
Correlation Matrix

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Religiosity ($M = 3.09$; $SD = .767$; $range = 1-5$)	1						
2. Spirituality ($M = 3.28$; $SD = .796$; $range = 1-5$)	.399**	1					
3. Forgiveness ($M = 3.39$; $SD = .663$; $range = 1-5$)	.074	.093*	1				
4. Religious struggles ($M = 1.42$; $SD = .784$; $range = 1-5$)	-.498**	-.202**	-.068	1			
5. P. Religious Coping ($M = 3.33$; $SD = .634$; $range = 1-4$)	.505**	.147**	.042	-.703**	1		
6. Satisfaction with life ($M = 3.91$; $SD = 1.43$; $range = 1-7$)	.119**	-.003	.095*	-.098*	.090*	1	
7. Generalized anxiety ($M = 2.46$; $SD = .699$; $range = 1-4$)	.023	.030	-.242**	-.114	.118*	-.298**	1

$N = 560$ ** $p < .01$; * $p < .05$

Regression Analyses

In order to find the predictors of satisfaction with life, Stepwise regression analysis was completed in the first step, the factor ‘religiosity’ is inserted to model only. In the second step, the two predictors of religiosity and forgiveness are inserted simultaneously. Life satisfaction is accepted as a dependent variable. Spirituality, religious struggles, positive religious coping are excluded variables. The mentioned regression analysis is shown in Table 2.

Table 2.

Predictors of Satisfaction with Life (Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis)

	Predictors	β (p)	ΔR^2 (p)
Step 1	Religiosity	.119 (.005) .012 (.005)	
Step 2	Religiosity Forgiveness	.112 (.008) .087 (.039)	.018 (.002)

Findings of Table 2 show us that religiosity and forgiveness were statistically noteworthy predictors on life satisfaction. In the first step, ‘religiosity’ alone accounts for 1.2% of the alteration in life satisfaction ($\Delta R^2=.012$; $F=8.005$; $p=.005$). However, in the second step, ‘religiosity’ and ‘forgiveness together account for 1.8% of the alteration in life satisfaction ($\Delta R^2=.018$; $F=6.169$; $p=.002$). As regards Beta coefficients, a positive relationship was observed between religiosity and life satisfaction, forgiveness, and life satisfaction. (See Step 2: $\beta=.119$; $t=2.829$; $p=.005$ for ‘religiosity’; $\beta=.087$; $t=2.070$; $p=.039$ for ‘forgiveness’). The findings indicate that “life satisfaction” increases as “religiosity” and “forgiveness” increase. The findings supported partially the H_6 : *that independent variables (religiosity, spirituality, forgiveness, positive religious coping, and religious struggle) will predict participants’ levels of satisfaction with life.*

To determine the predictors of generalised anxiety hierarchical regression analysis (stepwise method) is conducted. In the first step, the factor ‘forgiveness’ is inserted only. In the second step, the two predictors of forgiveness and positive religious coping are inserted simultaneously. In step 3, three predictors of positive religious coping, forgiveness, and religious struggles are entered into the regression model. The dependent variable is generalized anxiety. Spirituality and religiosity are excluded variables. The results of the regression analysis were offered in Table 3.

Table 3.

Predictors of Generalised Anxiety (Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis)

	Predictor	β (p)	ΔR^2 (p)
Step 1	Forgiveness	-.242 (.000)	.057 (.000)
	Forgiveness	-.248 (.000)	
Step 2	Positive Religious Coping	.128 (.002)	.072 (.000)
	Forgiveness	-.243 (.000)	
	Positive Religious Coping	.210 (.000)	
Step 3	Religious Struggles	.117 (.042)	.077 (.000)

Table 3 displays us that forgiveness, positive religious coping and religious struggles were significant predictors of generalised anxiety. In the first step, ‘forgiveness only accounts for 5.7% of the variance in generalized anxiety ($\Delta R^2=.057$; $F=34.804$; $p=.000$). In the second step, ‘positive religious coping’ and ‘forgiveness’ together account for 7.2% of the alteration in generalized anxiety ($\Delta R^2=.072$; $F=22.609$; $p=.000$). However, in the third step, ‘forgiveness’, ‘positive religious coping’ and ‘religious struggles’ collectively account for 7.7% of the variance in generalized anxiety ($\Delta R^2=.077$; $F=16.542$; $p=.000$). As respects Beta coefficients, a negative link was observed between forgiveness and generalized anxiety. Beta coefficients also showed that positive religious coping and religious struggles are related positively with generalised anxiety (see Step 3: $\beta=-.243$; $t=-5.969$; $p=.000$ for ‘forgiveness’; $\beta=.210$; $t=3.673$; $p=.000$ for ‘positive religious coping’; $\beta=.117$; $t=2.037$; $p=.042$ for ‘religious struggles’). The results indicate that “generalised anxiety” increases as “positive religious coping” and “religious struggles” increase, on the other hand ‘generalised anxiety’ decreases as ‘forgiveness’ increases. The findings supported partially the H_1 : *that independent variables (religiosity, spirituality, forgiveness, positive religious coping, and religious struggle) will predict participants’ levels of generalized anxiety.*

Discussion and Conclusions

The central purpose of the current study was to study the links of spirituality, religiosity, religious coping, and forgiveness with generalized anxiety and life satisfaction. The study aims to bridge the gap found in the literature with regard to the variables of research in relation to cultures beyond the Western world. Furthermore, the study aimed to investigate the links between gender and main study variables (spirituality, forgiveness, anxiety, life satisfaction, and religious coping). At this juncture, the current research anticipates to advance different findings to the prevailing findings and seeks to promote cross-cultural discussions concerning religiosity, spirituality, religious coping, forgiveness, anxiety, and life satisfaction links.

With regards to the earliest hypothesis of the study ($H1_{a-b}$), the findings designate that there is a statistically significant and positive association between religiosity and satisfaction with life but there is a negative but not statistically significant relationship between religiosity and generalized anxiety. The finding is coherent with the findings of the former studies which are showing the positive link between satisfaction with life and religiosity. Various studies indicated that religiosity has a positive contribution to people’s levels of life satisfaction (Fiori, Browni, Cortina & Antonucci, 2006; Tiliouine & Belgoumidi, 2009; Ayten, 2013; Ayten & Ferhan, 2016, Ayten, 2017). Studies showed that the positive relationship between religiosity and life satisfaction has emerged especially in relatively religious countries. For example, Okulicz-Kozaryn (2012) argued that the impact of religiosity on life satisfaction

changes from country to country. For him, religiosity has a more positive influence on life satisfaction and happiness among religious societies in comparison to secular societies. This might be explained by the recognition that the positive social support of religion to human life and human relations are more effective in religious countries than other secular countries.

In the current study, the findings did not support the hypotheses (H_2) with regards to the link between spirituality, life satisfaction, and generalized anxiety. It might be due to the reason that it used a self-rating scale to measure spirituality. On the contrary, many previous studies showed that spirituality has a positive contribution to people's levels of well-being, life satisfaction, happiness, and low anxiety (Coubrie & Davies, 2006; Gaudette & Jankowski, 2013).

As for the role of forgiveness on satisfaction with life and generalized anxiety (H_3) the findings of the study indicated that there is a statistically important positive link between forgiveness and satisfaction with life and a statistically significant negative correlation between forgiveness and generalized anxiety. The current study findings were consistent with the data from other studies indicating that forgiveness has a positive contribution to satisfaction with life, well-being, and low anxiety and low depression (Reed & Enright, 2006; Aytén & Ferhan, 2016; Kwok, Gu & Cheung, 2017).

Findings indicated that there are negative correlations between religious struggle, satisfaction with life, and generalized anxiety (see Table 1). But the link between religious struggle and generalized anxiety did not reach a statistically significant level. These findings were consistent with findings including a negative relationship between religious struggle and satisfaction with life from studies on Muslim samples (Abu-Raiya et al., 2018). Conversely, Zarzycka, and Zietek (2019) found that life satisfaction with life increases as sub-dimensions of religious struggle (e.g. divine, demonic, doubt) decrease. Besides, in most studies, religious struggle or negative religious coping (doubt, punishing God reappraisal, religious discontent, etc.) have been linked to poorer levels of well-being, life satisfaction, and greater levels of depression and anxiety (Aytén, 2012; Zamanian et al., 2015). Some exceptional studies showed that religious or spiritual struggles contribute to positive health indices by providing spiritual growth after trauma (Stauner, Exline & Pargament, 2016).

The present research found positive links between positive religious coping and satisfaction with life and generalized anxiety. These results were consistent with findings concerning the positive link between positive religious coping and life satisfaction (Ross et al. 2009; Aytén, 2012; Aytén et al. 2012; Turan, 2018). Conversely, findings concerning the positive correlation between positive religious coping and generalized anxiety complied with most study findings (Freitas et al., 2015). This might be explained by arguing that when people feel anxiety, they use

more positive religious coping activities, especially in religious societies.

Similar to previous literature, findings from multiple regression analyses indicated that religiosity and forgiveness had a significant contribution to predicting life satisfaction with life (Fiori, Browni, Cortina & Antonucci, 2006; Abdel-Khalek, 2010; Ayten, 2013; Ayten & Ferhan, 2016). Spirituality, positive religious coping and religious struggle were not statistically noteworthy predictors for satisfaction with life. Furthermore ‘religiosity’ and ‘forgiveness together accounted for only 1.8% of the alteration in satisfaction with life. Depending on these findings it might be said that religiosity and forgiveness have a contribution to individuals’ levels of satisfaction with life but many other factors explain an individual’s satisfaction with life such as marital status, socio-economic status, age, life quality, health conditions, etc.

This study also examined the predictors of generalized anxiety. Forgiveness, positive religious coping and religious struggle were significant predictors for generalized anxiety, but religiosity and spirituality were not significant predictors. Consistent with various studies forgiveness (self-forgiveness, forgiving others, and forgiving negative life events, etc.) had contributed to decreasing general anxiety (Çardak, 2012; Gençoğlu, Şahin & Topkaya, 2018). Very exceptional studies showed that forgiveness (self-forgiveness, forgiveness other, etc.) has no contribution or negative contribution to generalized anxiety. As it is found in various studies religious struggle (or negative religious coping) increased the level of general anxiety (Lucero et al., 2013; Abu-Raiya, Pargament, Weissberger, & Exline, 2016), but findings including positive religious coping that showed contribution to increasing anxiety were not consistent with previous studies (Rosmarin, Pargament, & Mahoney, 2009). Furthermore, according to the findings, three variables together accounted only for 7% of the variance in generalized anxiety. Thus, there might be some other factors which are affecting individuals’ level of generalized anxiety such as health problem, school problems, romantic relation problems, socioeconomic issues, etc.

Study Limits and Instructions for Coming Research

The current study has some limitations to be mentioned **(a)** Due to the present study focusing on the levels of participants’ religiosity and spirituality by measuring with self-rate scales the researchers believe that if religiosity and spirituality scales were used there would be possibly different conclusions with regards the relationships between spirituality, religiosity, and mental health indices. **(b)** The scope of this study only focuses on undergraduate students. That means the research sample is collected among similar education level, marital status, age, and socio-economical level. It is very vital to illuminate the link between independent variables (spirituality, religiosity, religious coping, forgiveness) and dependent variables (satisfaction with life, and generalized anxiety) by using samples collected from a different age, education,

marital status, etc. (c) Current study findings suggested that the relations between religious coping (negative and positive), religiosity, forgiveness, and well-being among Muslims are complex and at the same time possibly mediated and moderated by many factors. It is needed a more detailed and nuanced analysis of the relationships between the two group variables mentioned above. (d) Lastly, the present study used one-dimension religious coping scales both positive religious coping and religious struggle. Future studies should look at other types of religious coping (both negative and positive) such as demonic, meaning, interpersonal struggles, benevolent religious reappraisal, interpersonal religious dissatisfaction, spiritual/ religious discontent, religious forgiving, punishing God reappraisal, religious purification, etc.

Ethical Statement

The authors declare that all the procedures of the study were conducted in compliance with the Helsinki Declaration. Voluntary participation, anonymity and informed consent were ensured for all participants and there was no experimental manipulation involved in the study.

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