



The relationship between religion and the on-road behaviour of adolescents in Iran



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ABSTRACT

Iran has a high traffic fatality rate and a substantial proportion of those killed on the road are adolescents. The aim of the present study was to examine the relationship between dimensions of religiosity and the on-road behaviour of adolescents as pedestrians, cyclists and other non-driving activities. A total of 1111 students attending secondary schools in Tehran (Iran) completed the Adolescent Road User Behaviour Questionnaire (ARBQ) and the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL). This study found that adolescents who participated less often in private religious activities were more likely to be: male, have relatives or friends who had been killed in a road collision, previously involved in a road crash themselves and engaged more often in dangerous playing on the road. Adolescents reporting higher levels of religious attendance and intrinsic religiosity were more likely to be: male, without a traffic accident history, younger, from public schools, studying at schools in large urban areas and more frequently engaged in planned protective behaviours. Adolescents with higher involvement in intrinsic religiosity tended to be those: without an accident history, who did not have relatives or friends that had been killed in a crash and who engaged less frequently in unsafe road crossing behaviour. The findings of this study indicate that the different dimensions of religiousness are related to adolescents' behaviour on the road. Thus, it appears that religion may have a role to play in improving the road safety of adolescents in Iran.

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1. Introduction

Road traffic collisions are a major public health and socioeconomic problem in developing countries such as Iran (Peden et al., 2004; World Health Organization, 2013). According to the World Health Organization (2013) Iran has the fourth highest road traffic fatality rate (34.1 per 100,000 population) in the world. Adolescents are a particularly vulnerable group of road users and according to a report by the Iranian Forensic Medicine Organization (2012), 7565 adolescents (aged 11–17 years) were killed in traffic accidents between 2006 and 2011.

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Traffic accidents, injuries and fatalities are caused by both human and environmental issues, which can be placed into two categories: proximal factors and distal factors. Proximal factors have a direct effect on traffic behaviour, for instance: pedestrian behaviour, road conditions and traffic rules. Distal factors affect traffic behaviour externally, such as: fundamentalism, cultural beliefs, religion and attitudes (Melinder, 2007; Yildirim, 2007).

A large body of research has investigated the effect of religiosity as a predictor of: crime, divorce, prejudice, fertility, work, achievement, addiction, depression, suicide, hospitalizations, well-being and pedestrian behaviour (Durant & Sanders, 1989; Koenig, 1998; Koenig, George, & Titus, 2004; Yildirim, 2007). Furthermore, research has found higher levels of religiosity play a considerable role in reducing health-related risk behaviours among adolescents (Nonnemaker, Mcneely, & Blum, 2003).

The role of many different factors have been investigated with regards to the behavioural and psychological correlates of traffic crashes, but little research has studied the effect of religion on road user behaviour. Nevertheless, in one of the few studies which have investigated this issue Chliaoutakis, Darviri, and Demakakos (1999) found that religiousness was negatively related to accident involvement in young Greek drivers (18–24). A second study, also in Greece, found religion to be negatively related to ordinary violations, such as running red lights or risky overtaking (Chliaoutakis, Koukoulis, Lajunen, & Tzamalouka, 2005). Furthermore, a Turkish study investigated the influence of the intrinsic and extrinsic dimensions of religiousness on the road user behaviours of students attending two universities in Turkey (Yildirim, 2007). Yildirim reported that higher levels of intrinsic religiosity (e.g. I try hard to live my whole life according to my religious beliefs) had a positive influence on behaviour among pedestrians and drivers of all ages. The road users with a more internal religious orientation had lower tendencies to commit ordinary traffic violations, such as speeding on a residential road and as pedestrians were less likely to cross the road when the crossing light was red. Extrinsic religiosity (e.g. I pray mainly to gain relief and protection) was related to a decreased frequency of aggressive violations (e.g. sound your horn to indicate your annoyance), but pedestrians who were more extrinsically religious were more frequently involved in road traffic crashes (Yildirim, 2007). In contrast to the previous research Rosenbloom, Nemrodov, and Barkan (2004) found that pedestrians in a conservative ultra-orthodox city engaged more often in road violations than those in a more secular non-orthodox city.

The Adolescent Road User Behaviour Questionnaire (ARBQ) is a validated framework which consists of three dimensions: unsafe road crossing behaviours (e.g. forget to look properly because you are thinking about something else), dangerous playing on the road (e.g. play football on the road) and planned protective behaviour (e.g. wear reflective clothing when crossing a road). The ARBQ has been used in the UK (Elliott & Baughan, 2004), New Zealand (Sullman & Mann, 2009), Spain (Sullman et al., 2011) and Belgium (Sullman, Thomas, & Stephens, 2012). This research has found that adolescent males engage more often in risky on-road behaviours and that older adolescents are more likely to report engaging in the different types of unsafe and risky behaviour on the road (Elliott & Baughan, 2004; Sullman & Mann, 2009; Sullman et al., 2011, 2012). The on-road behaviour of adolescents has also been found to be related to the adolescents' area of residence. A UK study found that adolescents from large urban areas reported more dangerous crossing behaviour than those from small and rural areas (Elliott & Baughan, 2004). As would be expected, unsafe crossing behaviour and dangerous playing on the road have also been found to be related to accident involvement on the road (Sullman et al., 2012).

Iran is the sixth largest Muslim country in the world and Muslims comprise about 75 million, or 99.4% of Iran's population. Islam is the state religion and Farsi is the main and national language (Ebrahimnejad, 2002; Statistical Centre of Iran, 2011; The Future of the Global Muslim Population, 2011). In Iran religion has extended its influence into politics, the economy, culture and basically every dimension of daily life. According to Islamic principles, Muslims must respect the rights of others and obey various rules in the community, including traffic regulations (Yildirim, 2007). Thus, in Iran religion can be considered to be a crucial and effective element for establishing a positive traffic culture. Therefore, the focus of the present study was to investigate the relationship that the three ARBQ factors have with dimensions of religiosity in a sample of adolescents attending secondary schools in Iran.

2. Method

This study was conducted as part of a larger study which involved the development and testing of a Persian version of the Adolescent Road user Behaviour Questionnaire (ARBQ). This cross-sectional study was carried out in two cities (Tehran and Pishva) in the province of Tehran (Iran) during 2013.

2.1. Participants

The sample was comprised of 1200 students from large and small urban areas, which were selected through multistage random sampling. Tehran city was selected as the large urban area and Pishva was selected as the small urban area. At the last nationwide Census in 2011, Tehran city's population was 8,244,535 and Pishva's population was 75,454 (Statistical Centre of Iran, 2011).

Two municipal districts were randomly selected from Tehran's 22 municipal districts, one from the north (high socioeconomic area) and the other from the south (low socioeconomic area). Four public and four private schools (8 schools) were randomly selected from each district. Half of these schools were for boys only and the other half were for girls only. In the town of Pishva only four public secondary schools (two boys' schools and two girls' schools) were randomly selected. In total, 20 schools were included in the study, half of which were junior high schools (7th, 8th, 9th grade) and the other half were

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