Perceived islamophobia: Scale development and validation

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

"Islamophobia" has been used as an umbrella term capturing different types of religious stigma towards Muslims. However, the operationalization of the term for research purposes varies greatly, where little attention heretofore has been paid on how islamophobia affects Muslim minorities' lives. Against this background, we aimed to develop and validate the Perceived Islamophobia Scale (PIS). In the first study (167 German-Arabs, 184 German-Turks and 205 British-Pakistanis), exploratory factor analyses of a preliminary item pool gave support of a three-factor scale in all samples. Subscales were computed for each factor (i.e., perceptions of a general fear of Islam and Muslims, fear of islamization, and islamophobia in the media), which were reliable across the samples. In all samples, the PIS was positively related to psychological distress and in two samples this relation remained significant, after controlling for experiences of discrimination. In Study 2 (262 German-Turks, 277 French-Maghrebis and 249 British-Pakistanis), confirmatory factor analyses supported the structural equivalence of the scale's three-factor solution. The PIS was positively related to perceived stress and discrimination. Lastly, PIS predicted higher levels of religious and ethnic identification, controlling for discrimination. The PIS seems to be a valid and reliable measure across different Muslim minority groups. The fact that perceptions of islamophobia in two samples negatively predicted psychological distress after controlling for experiences of discrimination, suggests that anti-discrimination laws may be insufficient in protecting Muslim minorities of the negative effects of stigma on psychological well-being.

1. Introduction

Islamophobia is gradually gaining scientific acceptance as a construct distinct from closely related terms, such as anti-Muslim stereotypes, racism or xenophobia (Lee, Gibbons, Thompson, & Timani, 2009). However, the development of instruments assessing fear towards Muslim and Islam is still in its early stages. While one scale is available to assess islamophobic sentiments among members of the larger society, there is to date no instrument available to capture Muslim minorities' own perception of islamophobia in their societies of settlement. Given that many instruments exists that measure, for instance, minorities' perceived ethnic discrimination (e.g., Contrada et al., 2001) or perceived racism (e.g., McNeilly et al., 1996), the development of a respective scale seems timely in view of the rise of anti-Muslim attitudes in the Western World.

Against this background, the goal of the present article is twofold: first to develop a Perceived Islamophobia Scale (PIS), and second to investigate its construct validity by testing whether it predicts Muslim minorities' psychological well-being

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and identity and whether it is associated with perceived discrimination. The paper comprises of two studies with samples from four different Muslim minority groups: German-Arabs, German-Turks, French-Maghrebis and British-Pakistanis.

1.1. Operationalizing islamophobia

As Europe's economies started to revive in the aftermath of the Second World War, immigration was not only encouraged, but a necessity for many Western European governments. As a result, many traditionally culturally more or less homogenous countries have become home to a broad range of ethno-cultural groups. Initially, their religious belief played a subordinate role in the partly xenophobic sentiments prevalent in public discourse in most of the immigrant receiving countries. However, as Strabac and Listhaug (2008) state, "a series of international events in the last couple of decades has increased the saliency of the Muslim religion as a marker of minority-group identity" (p. 269). There is no gainsaying that negative attitudes towards Islam and Muslims as a religious group have risen in the Western world, in particular after the terror attacks of 9/11 in the United States. Reports have shown a substantial increase of discrimination and assaults on Muslims and a rise of negative attitudes towards Muslims in the Western majority populations (e.g., Allen & Nielsen, 2002; EUMC, 2005; EUMC, 2006) and the media (e.g., Saeed, 2007).

This development in attitude has increasingly been termed "islamophobia", a term introduced by the Runnymede Trust Commission (1997). However, as social phenomena come to the fore, controversies about their scope, definition or even existence arise. Thus, the term "islamophobia" has been plagued with controversies. While some researchers have placed islamophobia in line with other forms of phobia and defined it as an irrational fear of Islam and Muslims (Gottschalk & Greenberg, 2008), others have criticized it, and equated it to another term for anti-Muslim hostility and stereotypes (see, e.g., Halliday, 1999). Central to this critique is the way islamophobia has been operationalized. Studies vary widely in their operationalization, and many researchers seem to have used the term as though it was synonymous with anti-Muslim stereotypes, discrimination or racism rather than fear (see Lee et al., 2009 for a discussion).

In line with Lee et al. (2009), we argue that islamophobia should essentially be understood as an affective part of social stigma towards Islam and Muslims, namely fear. Put in a nutshell, we adopt Gottschalk and Greenberg's (2008) definition of islamophobia as "a social anxiety towards Islam and Muslim cultures" (p. 5) in the present study. Thus, in contrast to negative stereotypes towards Muslims (e.g., putting Muslims on a level with terrorists), islamophobia can be seen as explicitly focusing on the fear response towards Muslims and their religion. Individuals can be thought to personally experience such a fear in their own life, for instance by being avoided, which would be similar to the experiences commonly referred to as discrimination. However, they can also be thought to gather a more aggregated perception of fear-based islamophobia as a group norm or attitude of the members of the dominant society.

Research showing that personal stigma experiences (e.g., in form of discrimination) and perceived stigma in form of group norms can have different effects on psychological well-being, underscore the importance of scales measuring both types of constructs. For instance, a study showed that whereas personal discrimination negatively predicted self-esteem, group discrimination predicted higher levels on the variable (Bourguignon, Seron, Yzerbyt, & Herman, 2006). In addition to replicating the latter findings, another study showed that group discrimination predicted higher levels of in-group identity, whereas personal discrimination did the opposite (Armenta & Hunt, 2009).

Scales measuring islamophobia from such a group and fear perspective are rare. We could only identify one scale that has been developed to assess fear-based islamophobia among non-Muslim majority groups (see, e.g., Lee et al., 2009). Moreover, only one study so far seems to have investigated *perceived* islamophobia and some of its psychological effects among Muslim minorities (see Kunst, Tajamal, Sam, & Ulleberg, 2012). However, the items used to measure islamophobia did not report on some important psychometric properties, such as the structural equivalence, which is a prerequisite in cross-cultural comparative studies (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997).

1.2. The effect of stigma experiences on minoritie's psychological adaptation and identity

Adapting to, or living in, a cultural sphere or society that is different from one's heritage culture can be a psychologically demanding process for ethnic minorities (Walsh, Shulman, & Maurer, 2008). Assessing ethnic minorities' psychological adaptation in form of their psychological well-being has been a prominent approach to gather information about their psychological functioning in the society of residence. Because ethnic minorities often constitute social groups that are chronically exposed to negative attitudes in the society, experiences of stigma can be a factor that can critically influence this adaptation.

In various studies, stigma experiences have been shown to have detrimental effects on individuals' psychological adaptation. Experiences of, for instance, discrimination or racism have frequently been associated with negative psychological outcomes, such as anxiety, depression and psychological distress (see, e.g., Jung, Hecht, & Wadsworth, 2007; Pascoe & Smart Richman, 2009; Todorova, Falcón, Lincoln, & Price, 2010; Yip, Gee, & Takeuchi, 2008). A similar relationship has also been observed between negative meta-stereotypes (i.e., the perception of the majority's negative stereotypes towards one's group) and psychological adaptation (Gordijn, 2010; Vorauer, Main, & O'Connell, 1998).

While to date there is dearth of studies directly measuring the effects of religious stigma on Muslim minorities' psychological adaptation, a recent study elucidates the potential role societal stigma might play in this regard. Johnston and Lordan (2011) compared the psychological adaptation of British Muslims before and after 9/11. Their results found a significant