

Relationship Between Perceived Impact of Terrorism and Optimism in Adults of Karachi, Pakistan

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The present study aimed to identify the relationship between the perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism of adults of Karachi, Pakistan. It was hypothesized that there would be a negative correlation between the perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism of adults. A total of 100 participants (72 males, 28 females) were recruited through convenience sampling from various organizations of Karachi, Pakistan. The age of participants ranged between 25 to 40 years with a minimum education level of Intermediate/A-levels. Data was collected using through ⁵Terrorism Impact Scale and Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) scale. The results of the present study revealed non-significant correlation ($r=-0.10$, $p>0.05$) between the variables, signifying that the perceived impact of terrorism had no relationship with dispositional optimism in adults in the present sample. Further studies are needed to explore the existing optimism in the presence of terrorism in the Pakistani context.

Keywords. Terrorism, perceived impact of terrorism, dispositional optimism

Terrorism is one of the major socio-political issues faced worldwide as it affects every aspect of human life. Terrorism has been studied differently by different researchers, according to Saul (2006) terrorism can be defined as “criminal acts directed against a state and

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intended or calculated to create a state of terror in the minds of particular persons, a group of persons or the general public”.

Terrorism has become a leading cause of death and disability worldwide. According to United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, (USCIRF 2004), about 430 people were killed during the year 2003-2004 which has increased many fold and in the year 2014, around 13,463 terrorist attacks occurred worldwide resulting in 32,700 fatalities. Amongst these attacks, 60% took place in: Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nigeria and India, Out of which 78% of the fatalities occurred in: Iraq, Nigeria, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Syria (United States Department of States, 2015).

Terrorism is a major problem in Pakistan and has been affecting its citizens since past few years. The number of death toll increased from 189 per year in 2003 to 3565 in 2015 (South Asia Terrorism Portal, 2015). Pakistan has been playing a significant role globally in war against terrorism and is facing a complex position. The main event in history of terrorism was 9/11 after which Pakistan joined hands with USA in war against terrorism. The permission of Pakistan to US Armed forces to operate from its land and US's interference in internal affairs of Pakistan, diminished the image of US in public (Tarar & Rubina, 2010). Suicide attacks became frequent after US embassy of Beirut got targeted in 1983. After this incident suicide attacks increased in Lebanon, Turkey, Russia, Pakistan, United States, Yemen, Israel, Sri Lanka, India and Afghanistan (Pape, 2003).

Besides causing loss of lives and injuries, terrorism affects the stability, growth and development of society as a whole. The world economy is drastically affected by terrorism (Abadie & Gardeazabal, 2008). The international finance markets extensively get disturbed as costs decline following a terror attack (Brounen & Derwall, 2010). Terrorism also diminishes government's image and puts a question mark on their ability to fight against evil forces. Research also shows that in a country where there are on and off terrorist events, terrorism negatively affects governments' survival (Indridason, 2008) and vote casting behavior of public (Kibris, 2010).

Education which is a basic human right suffers tremendously following any terrorist activity. The profound long term effects of

terrorism on education were studied by Malley (2010). According to him, terrorism in any country affects teachers, it results in the demotivation of teachers to continue with their jobs and also make them leave the country. At student level, it results in creating immense fear in the minds of students and their parents as well, because of which they may not send the child back to school. In Pakistan, education is the main sector which suffered most in the hands of terrorism. The main areas affected are Swat valley, Peshawar and Baluchistan where educational institutions were targeted frequently by extremist groups who are against education and particularly the education of girls and hence mainly girls' education suffered the most (Ijaz, 2015). According to Younas (2011), around 1600 schools were destroyed in Khyber Pakhtun Khwa and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) and 721,392 students got affected from these attacks.

Terrorism also have detrimental effects on the health of people. It tends to affect a person's physical and emotional health. Research reveals that people who live with fear and anxiety about terrorist attacks are prone to develop cardiovascular diseases and this threat can even cause death (Almendrala, 2015). Terrorism also leaves negative effects on emotional health. Terrorist activities adversely affect the mental health of individuals by inculcating fear, anxiety and depression. This fear and anger further influences perception about terrorism, fear has been found to increase the perceived risk of terrorism whereas anger does the opposite (Lerner, Gonzales, Small & Fischhoff, 2002). Research conducted by Khan, Sarhandi, Hussain, Iqbal and Taj (2012) reveals the negative effects of terrorism, as the participants were found to be depressed and anxious due to terror attacks. Terrorism severely impacts the mental health of the affected population (Sadia, 2011) as victims become more vulnerable of developing mental health problems following a terrorist activity (Medhi & Deepanjali, 2013).

Terrorism not only heightens negative emotions but also affects positive emotions such as optimism. A Study conducted by Ai et al. (2006) explored the relationship between optimism, PTSD (post-

traumatic stress disorder) and personal loss in the attack following the incidents of 9/11 on graduates and undergraduates. The results revealed that those students who had a personal loss in the attacks of 9/11 showed an association of low optimism and high scores on PTSD. This indicates the association of traumatic effect of terrorism and optimism in post-traumatic distress.

Dispositional optimism is defined as global perpetual anticipation that there will be better outcomes in the future than bad (Scheier & Carver, 1985). Often these expectancies formulate one's perception about the future, which in turn have considerable effects on his/her performances in present and strive towards future. These expectancies can either lead a person to move in the direction of desirable goals or move away from undesirable goals (Scheier & Carver, 1999).

Coping strategies of optimists differ significantly from pessimists as they focus more on positives than negatives. Optimists have a problem-solving approach (Scheier, Wentraub & Carver, 1986) therefore; they use approach-oriented strategies instead of avoiding the problem by denial. Researches show that one of the mechanisms of optimists coping with difficulties is to attend to more positive than negative aspects of an event (Litt, 1992). Thus, optimists seem to adapt better to life changes and challenges. As cited by Brissette, Scheier and Carver (2002), optimists are better in coping with transitions to college than pessimists. Nonetheless, the adaptation is not restricted to ordinary life changes and it is also found to be associated with chronic illness such as AIDS (Taylor et al., 1992) and cancer (Carver et al., 1993).

Optimism is also positively associated with one's psychological health. It is a sound moderator for stress levels. The study shows that there is a negative correlation between optimism and stress levels (Scheier & Carver, 1987). Research also shows an inverse relationship between optimism and suicidal ideation among college students (Hirsch, Conner & Duberstein, 2007) and between optimism and depressive symptoms among multiple sclerosis patients (Hart, Stacey et al., 2008). The benefits of optimism extend to physical health as well (Scheier & Carver, 1992) whereas pessimism in turn creates risk for illnesses (King, 2008). Optimists are likely to recover from illnesses and resume to

normal life after surgical process relatively quickly (Scheier & Carver, 1989) and also have better health outcomes and health enhancing habits (Scheier & Carver, 1992). Several studies have shown that optimists recover better after terminal illnesses such as cancer. Carver et al. (1993) conducted a study on women in early stage cancer and the investigated the relationship between optimism, distress and the mechanism of coping. The findings suggested a negative correlation between optimism and stress.

Nonetheless, there are some contributing factors that affect optimism negatively such as negative past experiences, low self-esteem, low satisfaction and disturbed relationships. Some environmental factors also adversely affect optimism such as economic instability due to law and order disturbances which might include terrorist activities. In Pakistan, terrorism is affecting the lives of the nation in all aspects be it personal, social, economic, business, educational or health. It has also been observed that Pakistani nation has overall reclined to pessimism as the families are shifting abroad due to state insecurity. Students are also seeking opportunities for education and job in foreign countries because they do not see a future in Pakistan. The rationale behind conducting this research is to see how terrorism in addition to creating fear relates with positive emotions like optimism in adult population of Karachi. The hypothesis of the study is that there would be a negative relationship between the perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism of adults living in Karachi, Pakistan.

Method

Participants

A total of 100 participants were recruited through convenient sampling from following organizations; Bahria University (Karachi campus), J.S Bank, Aaj TV Network, Meezan Bank, Bank Al-Falah,

Ziauddin Hospital, Darul Sehat Hospital, Admore Petroleum and Elastica.

Inclusion criteria

Those participants were included in the study who were within the age range of 25 to 40 years, were currently working full time, had a minimum 12 years of education and belonged to middle class (salary between 30,000 to 150,000).

Exclusion criteria

Those suffering from any psychiatric or serious physical illness or those who had any recent traumatic experience (within past 6 months) were excluded from the study.

Measures

Informed consent form

The informed consent form was used to get an agreement for the participation in research. The rights of participants, including the purpose and method of study were informed. Confidentiality was ensured, however, it was mentioned that the data can be used in publication while maintaining the participant anonymity.

Demographic form

The Demographic Form was used to collect information regarding name, age, gender, qualification, occupation, residential area and income.

Terrorism impact scale (TIS)

The Terrorism Impact Scale (Malik, Khawar, Iftikhar, Saeed & Ilyas, 2010) was used to assess the impact of terrorism. This is an indigenous scale developed for Pakistani population in Urdu language.

It consists of 64 items. It is a self-report measure/ questionnaire which is rated on a 4 point Likert scale. The items are grouped into following 5 factors; Factor 1: State Affairs consists of 17 items, Factor 2: Psychosocial Distress consisting of 19 items, Factor 3: Governance Issues consisting of 13 items, Factor 4: Civil Affairs consists of 9 items and Factor 5: Resilience consisting of 6 items. 58 items of four factors measure negative impact, whereas 6 items of last factor measures positive impact.

Life orientation test revised (LOT-R)

The dispositional optimism was assessed through Life Orientation Test Revised (LOT-R) scale (Scheier, Carver & Bridges, 1994). It consists of 10 items rated on a 5 point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. This scale has strong criterion validity, a good test-retest reliability of .72 and an adequate internal consistency of .72.

Procedure

At first permission was sought from the management of desired organizations. After that, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study and were briefed about the confidentiality and their rights. Only those participants were recruited who volunteered to participate. The participants were provided informed consent form to sign. They were then asked to fill in the demographic sheet. Questionnaires of Terrorism Impact Scale (TIS) and Life Orientations Test Revised (LOT-R) scale.

Forms with any missing detail or any unanswered question were discarded. The data was analyzed through Pearson correlation test on SPSS version 20.

Results

The hypothesis was tested using Pearson correlation to identify the relationship between the perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism.

Table 1

| Percentage of Participant's Age | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Age | N | % |
| 25-30 | 55 | 55 |
| 30-35 | 22 | 22 |
| 35-40 | 23 | 23 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 2

| Percentage of Participants' Gender | | |
|------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Gender | N | % |
| Male | 72 | 72 |
| Female | 28 | 28 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 3

| Percentage Of Participants' Qualification | | |
|---|----|----|
| Qualification | N | % |
| Intermediate | 5 | 5 |
| Bachelors | 47 | 47 |
| Masters | 45 | 45 |
| PhD | 2 | 2 |
| Total | 99 | 99 |
| Missing | 1 | 1 |

| | | |
|-------|-----|-----|
| Total | 100 | 100 |
|-------|-----|-----|

Table 4

Percentage of Income of Participants

| Income | N | % |
|--------------|-----|-----|
| 30000-50000 | 59 | 59 |
| 51000-70000 | 15 | 15 |
| 71000-90000 | 15 | 15 |
| 91000-150000 | 11 | 11 |
| Total | 100 | 100 |

Table 5

Correlation between Dispositional Optimism and Perceived Impact of Terrorism

| | | Dispositional optimism | Perceived Impact of Terrorism |
|-----------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Dispositional optimism | Pearson correlation | | -.10 |
| | Sig.(2 tailed) | | .15 |
| | N | | 100 |
| Terrorism | Pearson correlation | -.10 | |
| | Sig.(2 tailed) | .15 | |
| | N | 100 | |

Results indicate that there is almost no relationship in perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism. ($r = -.10$), $p > 0.05$

Table 6

Correlation between Dispositional optimism and sub scales of Terrorism Impact Scale

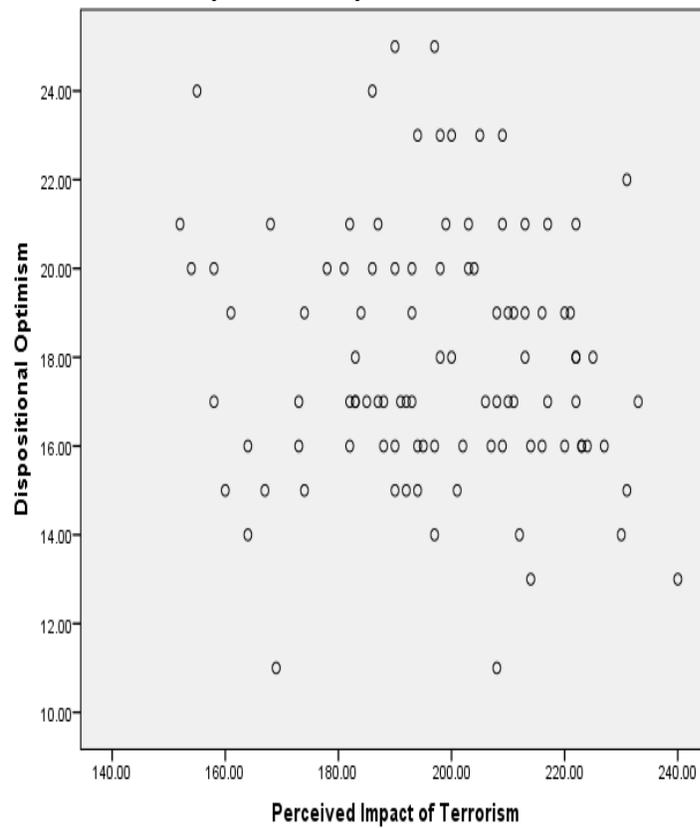
| | | SA | PD | GI | CA | R |
|-----------|---------------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| DO | Pearson correlation | -.09 | -.08 | .03 | -.01 | -.25 |
| | Sig.(2 tailed) | .17 | .20 | .36 | .45 | .01 |
| | N | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Note. DO=Dispositional optimism, SA=State affairs, PD=Psychological distress, GI=Governance issues, CA=Civic affairs, R=Resilience.

Table 6 indicates that there exist no correlation between Dispositional optimism and State affairs ($r=-.09$, $p>0.05$), Psychological distress ($r=-.08$, $p>0.05$), Governance issues ($r=.03$, $p>0.05$), Civic affairs ($r=-.01$, $p>0.05$). However, on the subscale of Resilience, there seems a weak negative relationship ($r=-.25$), $p< 0.05$

Figure 1

Scatter Plot Showing Correlation Between Perceived Impact of Terrorism and Dispositional Optimism



The scatter plot supports the previous statistical analysis i.e. there is no correlation between Perceived Impact of Terrorism and Dispositional optimism.

Discussion

The present study aimed at understanding the relationship between the perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism of adults in Karachi. It was hypothesized that there would be a negative relationship between the perceived impact of terrorism and dispositional optimism of adults of Karachi, Pakistan. However, the results failed to support the hypothesis and suggested alternate explanations that there exists no significant relationship between the two variables.

Based on the literature, there are various researches demonstrating that dispositional optimism is a stable trait and has little room for change (Peterson, 2000). Various studies also report that the optimism of person does not fluctuate when faced with turmoil such as terminal illnesses (Carver et al., 1993; Schou, Ekeberg, & Ruland, 2005). Other researches have provided the evidence that optimists remain unaffected by untoward situation. Carver, Lehman and Antoni (2003) predicted that optimist women going through breast cancer displayed less distress, fatigue and disturbance of routine life. Therefore, this might be the reason for no relation between the two variables that the people who were optimistic already, despite of being exposed to terrorism remained unaffected from the external factors.

There have been many researches regarding terrorism and the negative emotions however; very few published researches have explored the relationship of terrorism and positive emotions. Stability of optimism is shown in relation to terrorism and coping behavior, as cited by Bleich, Gelkopf and Solomon (2003) in a study conducted in Israel found that there was moderate psychological impact of exposure of terrorism on mental health symptoms and coping behavior. Low sense of safety and low distress were present but the participants reported optimistic view regarding themselves and the future of Israel. They also developed less psychiatric distress and expressed the capability to function in terrorist attack. This self-efficiency to possess an optimistic view and still able to function in such adverse situation is due to the coping strategies which help people to remain resilient. The results of the study were attributed to the habituation of the situation as they became accustomed to the war conditions. This habituation effect can be a reason

in our study as well; Pakistan has also been exposed to terrorism for a very long time. The people of Pakistan have also adapted to the situation and do not seem to get affected unless something major happens like suicide bombing or incident with numerous fatalities or someone gets directly affected by the event.

Other factors that might have contributed to the results of present study include counter-terrorism policies by government following Army Public School attack on December 16, 2014. The attack was a huge blow to the whole nation of Pakistan. It not only saddened the nation but also infused a sense of unity to fight against terrorism with a revitalized spirit. Military and government became subsequently active and implemented imperative measures. The Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif in January 2015, announced a 20-point National Action Plan which provided a layout for new terrorism policies. One of the highlighted features of the plan were establishment of military courts for two years and execution of capital punishment, resumed after 2008. These measures on part of government and military were successful in declining the crime rates and terrorist activities. The trust of public has been restored and resulted in the rise of their optimism. As reported in Express Tribune (2016), statistics have shown a 70% drop in terrorist activities with the nation overall having optimistic outlook towards the future of state.

On a personal level, dispositional optimism was found to be positively related with approach coping strategies, i.e. actively seeking out to solve problems and negatively related with avoidance coping strategies i.e. to ignore and avoid the problem. The findings also depicted that the people who are optimists possess ability to change the coping strategies as per the demand of the stressors (Nes & Segerstrom, 2006). This could be one explanation to the results that the optimists who face the stressors like terrorism, respond by actively trying to counter the problem and engage in effective coping strategies.

On a societal level, there are some prevailing cultural factors which might have contributed to this result like support system of family. In Pakistan, there is a collectivistic culture. In such cultures, people tend

to think about other's first, to show care for others and to support them in times of adversity. They make up the support system which includes family and friends. Even as a nation they are each other's support system which has been clearly depicted during the time when Pakistan was struck with either floods or earthquakes. The whole nation was united and funded for a cause i.e. to help their suffering brothers at the time of need. Hence, it could be concluded that people living in Karachi, Pakistan are optimistic because of the support system. In a study it was found that family support was positively related to optimism in the mothers of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (Ekas, Lickenbrock & Whitman, 2010). In another study social support was positively associated with self-esteem, which decreased depression and increased optimism in chronic illness (Petra & Ronald, 2003).

Selected age group might also have contributed to the lack of support for hypothesis. The age group for this study was 25-40. The formal operational stage (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958) starts at the age of 11. This is the last stage of cognitive development according to Piaget. When adolescents enter this stage of development they are able to do higher order reasoning and abstract thinking. In a study it was found that dispositional optimism was correlated with decision making styles in adolescence and also suggested providing guidance to learn adaptive-decision making skills (Magnano, Paolillo & Giacominielli, 2015). It suggests that adolescents' decision making is related to optimism, they can define goals for themselves and direct their energy to achieve those goals thus decides for their future.

The scores of the subscales also supported the overall relation of optimism and terrorism. Scores of State Affairs, Psychological Distress, Governance Issues and Civic Affairs indicated no correlation with Optimism. The subscale of State Affairs is defined as issues at a state level, such as negative interpretation of the country worldwide, Psychological Distress is defined as disturbance in one's mental health such as having irritable mood and sleep problems, Governance Issues is described as failure on part of government in resolving country's issues and lastly, Civic Affairs is defined as people's concern for consequences faced by society in response to terrorist activities. (Malik et al.,2010).

The last subscale of TIS, Resilience is described by Malik et al. (2010) as “The positive outcome in the negative situations which included feeling of brotherhood as a nation, helping fellow people, patriotism, faith in the security agencies and ambition to fight against terrorism”. Optimism is expecting more good than bad in the future (Scheier & Carver, 1985). In a 37 year long longitudinal study done on the American prisoners of war held in Vietnam dispositional optimism was found to strongly correlate with resilience (Segovia, Moore, Linnville, Hoyt & Hain, 2012). In another study resilience was related to high optimism in Kosovo crises (Rioli, Savicki & Cepani, 2002). The present study however yielded a very surprising result as it indicated a weak negative correlation between the two variables suggesting that as resilience increased the optimism decreased, contrary to the existing literature which supports a positive correlation between the two. One reason might be that the participants might not have understood the questionnaire properly, hence might not have responded accordingly.

Thus the results of the study failed to support the hypothesis and findings, which have been proved by available literature. Hence the results indicate that there exists no correlation between the two variables which might be due to other subject variables such as age of the participants, level of understanding of the questionnaire and certain cultural factors such as the support system. Further studies are needed to explore the existing optimism in the presence of terrorism in the Pakistani context.

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