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**THE INTERPLAY OF RELIGION, CULTURE, AND DEVIANCE: A
CORRELATIONAL STUDY OF PREDICTIVE RELATIONSHIPS**



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Abstract

This thesis examines the intricate interplay between religious convictions, cultural norms, and deviant behavior, employing a mixed-methods approach to explore their influence on moral reasoning and behavioral outcomes. The quantitative study (Study 1) employed a correlational design with a convenience sampling strategy, and data were collected from 185 participants. Religious Commitment Inventory (RC-10), Cultural Proficiency Belief Inventory, and Deviant Behaviour Variety Scale were used to measure Religious Commitment, Cultural Norms, and Deviant Behaviour. Results strongly revealed positive correlations between religious commitment and Deviant Behaviour ($r = .65, p < .001$), Cultural norms and Deviant Behaviour ($r = .26, p = .009$). Both religious convictions and cultural norms served as significant predictors of Deviant Behaviour ($R^2 = .48$). Gender differences were notable, with males exhibiting higher deviance (Cohen's $d = 0.65$). The qualitative study (Study 2) involved a purposive sampling strategy. Participant-led interviews were conducted with four subject matter experts, identifying ten superordinate themes, including the theoretical foundations of deviance, interpretive complexity, and the dual nature of deviance as both constructive and destructive. Findings suggest that rigid or misinterpreted religious and cultural frameworks can legitimize deviance, particularly when norms are imposed rather than internalized. The research challenges assumptions that religiosity inherently deters deviance, highlighting the role of contextual interpretation and socialization. Implications call for culturally sensitive interventions and moral education emphasizing critical reflection to address deviant behavior effectively.

Keywords: *religious convictions, cultural norms, deviant behavior, moral reasoning, socialization, negative religious coping, cultural deviance theory, interpretive complexity, gender differences, mixed-methods research.*

Introduction

Religion and culture are pivotal in shaping social structures and individual behaviors, aiming to promote moral conduct and societal harmony, yet their influence on deviant behavior is complex and sometimes contradictory. Religion provides universal moral codes through sacred texts and teachings, such as Christianity's Ten Commandments or Islam's concept of Taqwa, which generally deter immoral acts (Durkheim, 1915; Esack, 2005). However, rigid interpretations can lead to moral absolutism, where secular laws are rejected, as seen in cases like tax evasion justified as resistance to corrupt systems (Pargament, 2001). Culture, by contrast, operates through informal social expectations, like South Asian concepts of izzat (honor) and biradari (kinship loyalty), which often outweigh legal norms in regulating behavior (Shah, 2006). Deviance in such contexts is defined more by cultural violations, such as a woman eloping outside her caste, than by legal breaches, highlighting the relativity of deviance.

The interplay of religion and culture can both deter and facilitate deviant behavior.

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Misinterpretations of religious texts can justify actions like honor killings or terrorism, as seen with groups like ISIS, despite mainstream religious condemnation (Farsakh, 2017). Cultural practices such as female genital mutilation or forced marriages, rooted in tradition, are normalized locally but deemed deviant under international human rights standards (WHO, 2022). Conflicts between religious morality and legal systems further complicate matters, as seen in ultra-Orthodox Jewish communities' reluctance to report abuse to secular authorities or conservative Muslim families restricting girls' education to uphold modesty (Finkelhor, 2008). In multicultural settings, laws like France's face veil ban may be perceived as discriminatory, sparking civil disobedience labeled as deviant (Scott, 2007). Cultural norms can also enforce deviance through group loyalty, such as in tribal blood feuds, where illegal acts are culturally revered (Black-Michaud, 1975).

Individuals navigating conflicting religious, cultural, and legal expectations often experience cognitive dissonance, requiring psychological resilience to reconcile these tensions (Festinger, 1957). Some manage by compartmentalizing their religious and public lives, while others resist one system, leading to deviance or reform. The relationship between religion, culture, and deviance is context-dependent, often arising from competing loyalties rather than malicious intent. A nuanced understanding that considers cultural and religious backgrounds is crucial for fair legal and social interventions, allowing policymakers, psychologists, and educators to address deviance as a reflection of deeper socio-religious tensions rather than mere rule-breaking.

Religious convictions, deeply rooted in sacred texts and theological doctrines, shape individuals' moral and existential perspectives, influencing their thoughts, emotions, and actions. In Hinduism, for instance, the concept of Dharma guides ethical conduct and social duties (Flood, 1996). These convictions, whether lifelong or situational, provide an internal moral compass. They can be personal, arising from individual faith experiences like belief in karma or divine justice, or institutional, shaped by formal religious authorities through rituals and teachings (Durkheim, 1912). Personal convictions foster moral development and post-conventional morality, where actions stem from internal ethical standards (Kohlberg, 1981), while institutional convictions promote social cohesion by reinforcing a collective moral code.

Positive religious coping involves using faith, rituals, and community support to manage stress constructively, enhancing psychological resilience and social integration (Pargament, 1997). For example, a Muslim woman may find solace in prayer during illness, viewing it as a divine test. Such coping embeds individuals in supportive religious communities, fostering pro-social values like empathy and charity, which reduce deviant behavior through moral bonding (Koenig, 2001; Durkheim, 1912). Conversely, negative religious coping, such as interpreting hardships as divine punishment, can lead to emotional distress, depression, or maladaptive behaviors like substance abuse (Pargament et al., 1998). In rigid or authoritarian religious settings, fear-based teachings may foster guilt and isolation, increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior, particularly among youth in abusive or cult-like environments (Exline et al., 2000). Despite their role in promoting morality, religious convictions can be distorted to justify deviance. Extremist groups like Al-Qaeda or practices like honor killings misuse religious rhetoric to legitimize violence or oppression, often detached from mainstream theology (Juergensmeyer, 2003). Negative religious coping, combined with ideological convictions, can fuel such acts by framing the world as evil or the self as divinely chosen. These distortions highlight the risks of interpreting religious convictions without ethical or human rights considerations, leading to deviant behaviors that contradict the intended moral framework of religion.

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Cultural norms, as implicit behavioral expectations learned through social interaction, shape individual and group behavior without legal codification (Geertz, 1973). In East Asian societies, for instance, norms like filial piety and collectivism guide intergenerational and communal responsibilities, influencing emotional expression, workplace dynamics, and religious practices. These norms are internalized from childhood through family, peers, and media, and maintained by community approval or disapproval. They are categorized into folkways, mores, taboos, and laws (Sumner, 1906). Folkways, like greetings or etiquette, ensure smooth social interactions and form the basis of early socialization (Ferrante, 2016). Mores, tied to moral values like marital fidelity, carry stronger significance and their violation prompts disapproval, reinforcing group identity (Giddens et al., 2017). Laws, formalized norms enforced by institutions, shape civic duties and can align with the collective conscience, influencing moral compasses (Parsons, 1951).

Cultural norms significantly influence identity formation by defining social roles, hierarchies, and group membership, such as patriarchal norms assigning men as providers and women as caregivers, or Latino machismo encouraging male assertiveness (Arciniega et al., 2008). These norms, when internalized, guide decisions, sometimes conflicting with personal desires or external laws. Gender-based norms can foster deviance by normalizing practices like forced marriage or female genital mutilation, which are culturally accepted but illegal under international law (WHO, 2022). Such norms create environments where deviance is conformity within the cultural group, prioritizing social acceptance over legal compliance.

The jirga system in rural Pakistan and Afghanistan exemplifies how cultural norms can diverge from legal standards. These tribal courts use traditional codes to resolve disputes, endorsing practices like swara (marrying girls to settle conflicts), which are seen as legitimate locally but deviant under state and human rights laws (Yusuf, 2012). Social Norms Theory explains this conformity, as fear of exclusion often outweighs moral or legal objections, even among educated individuals. This highlights how cultural norms can perpetuate deviance by prioritizing group loyalty over broader ethical or legal frameworks.

Deviant behavior refers to actions that violate a society's formal (legal) or informal (cultural) norms, with its definition varying across contexts due to cultural relativity (Clinard & Meier, 2016). For example, public displays of affection may be acceptable in Western societies but deviant in conservative ones. Deviance is categorized as formal, involving illegal acts like robbery, or informal, such as breaching social norms like gender nonconformity. Sociologists distinguish primary deviance (initial rule-breaking) from secondary deviance, where individuals internalize a deviant identity and persist in such behavior (Lemert, 1951). Understanding deviance requires an interdisciplinary approach, integrating legal, sociological, psychological, and anthropological perspectives.

Deviance is socially constructed, shaped by a society's values, beliefs, and power structures, often reflecting control mechanisms more than individual morality (Becker, 1963). Social reactions like shame or punishment enforce conformity. In conservative or religious societies, tension between personal desires and dominant norms can lead to strain, driving deviant behavior, such as a woman eloping against cultural expectations or LGBTQ+ individuals engaging in hidden behaviors due to isolation. General Strain Theory and Routine Activity Theory explain how emotional strain and lack of protective environments enable deviance.

Deviance can also be a form of resistance against oppressive systems, as seen in civil disobedience or protest movements. For instance, Nelson Mandela's actions during apartheid or women defying

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Iran's hijab laws were labeled deviant but rooted in moral critiques of unjust norms (Scott, 1990). Such acts highlight deviance's dual nature as both potentially destructive and transformative, depending on context and intent, underscoring its role as a response to societal constraints or injustice.

Role in Socialization

Religious institutions, such as mosques, churches, and temples, are key agents of socialization, instilling values like honesty, charity, and respect through sermons, education, and rituals (Berger, 1967). For example, Jewish synagogues promote community service (*tikkun olam*), and Buddhist temples emphasize mindfulness (*ahimsa*), fostering moral development and social cohesion. However, cultural influences can distort religious teachings, as seen in Muslim societies enforcing gender segregation despite Islam's spiritual equity (Barlas, 2002), or Christian communities opposing same-sex marriage based on selective biblical interpretations. These cultural appropriations may lead to intergroup tensions and legal deviance framed as faith-based. Cultural institutions, including family, education, religion, and media, transmit values critical to primary and secondary socialization (Parsons, 1951). Families teach language, gender roles, and emotional expression, while schools reinforce national culture through curricula and rules. In Japan, for instance, discipline (*shitsuke*) and harmony (*wa*) shape behavior from school to workplace. These institutions collectively embed societal norms, guiding individual identity and behavior. Socialization influences deviant behavior in dual ways. It can deter deviance by teaching societal norms through positive reinforcement, but in environments like gangs or authoritarian households, deviant behaviors may be normalized and internalized as acceptable (Sutherland, 1947). For example, a child raised in a family glorifying honor-based violence may view it as righteous. Differential association theory highlights how interaction with deviant peers or role models fosters such behavior, underscoring socialization's role in either curbing or promoting deviance.

Related Theories

Stark and Bainbridge's **Religious Commitment Theory** (1980) posits that strong involvement in religious practices, through rituals, emotional attachment, and beliefs, reduces deviance by fostering internalized ethics and community oversight, as seen in low crime rates among Mormon communities in Utah (Albrecht et al., 1977). However, superficial or selective religious commitment can be exploited for personal or political gain, using faith to justify deviance rather than guide morality. Similarly, **Social Norms Theory** (Perkins & Berkowitz, 1986) highlights how perceived norms, even if inaccurate, drive behavior. For example, students overestimating peer alcohol use may drink more to conform, and in tight-knit communities, misperceptions of accepted behaviors like domestic violence can encourage deviance.

Cultural Deviance Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942) suggests that disadvantaged or socially disorganized communities develop subcultures with values that deviate from mainstream norms, redefining acts like theft or gang affiliation as practical responses to systemic exclusion, as seen in Brazilian favelas where drug trade participation is normalized. **Routine Activity Theory** (Cohen & Felson, 1979) explains deviance as the result of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian. In contexts like war-torn regions or communities where leaders overlook abuses (e.g., clerical or honor-based violence), the lack of accountability enables

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opportunistic deviance such as looting or assault.

General Strain Theory (Agnew, 1992) links deviant behavior to emotional and psychological stress from blocked goals, loss of positive stimuli, or negative experiences like abuse. Without legitimate coping mechanisms, individuals may turn to deviance, such as a stressed low-income student resorting to drug use or cheating. This theory frames deviance as a response to unresolved internal conflict, emphasizing emotional motivations over inherent criminality.

Purpose of study

The pressing need to understand the complex interplay between religious convictions, cultural norms, and Deviant behavior, particularly in their role in motivating this behavior. In a world where religion and culture significantly shape societal structures and individual choices, it becomes imperative to investigate how these factors may inadvertently contribute to deviant behavior. This study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how religious beliefs and cultural expectations intersect to influence moral reasoning and behavioral choices. On a personal level, this research stems from a deep interest in the psychological mechanisms that drive human behavior within sociocultural frameworks. By exploring this topic, I hope to contribute to both academic knowledge and practical solutions in addressing the root causes of deviant behavior.

Research Problem

Even after the myriads of researches undertaken so far, religion and culture remain to be an interacting social construct gap where they interplay in deviant behavior. It is of course a fact that religious belief can operate as a crime deterrent; but it can also be viewed that, in the right contexts, certain interpretations of religious texts or beliefs can legitimize deviant acts. Culture also simultaneously sets a backdrop against which people rationalize their criminal activities. This has critical question: How do religious convictions intersect with cultural expectations to shape an individual's propensity for deviant behavior? By studying these relationships, we can be able to identify the subtle competencies driving criminal activities

Equally concerning is the scarcity of more comprehensive studies on the integrated impact of religious and cultural influences on deviant activity within a multicultural society in which they normally operate inversely. For instance, at a given time or in any specific culture, where societies often have to tread the thin lines between cultural behavior and religious beliefs, some people might create cognitive dissonance that could teach them to rationalize crime as the way of resolving the conflicting tensions and hence survive and thrive in the environments. In this light, it could well be that knowledge of how these antagonistic attitudes and values shape what people do leads to better criminal justice interventions. This research fills in an important **gap** to study the interrelation of religious convictions, cultural norms and deviant behavior.

Hypothesis

1. There would be a positive association between Religious Conviction and Deviant Behaviour means people have extreme religious commitments more likely to show deviance.
2. High level of Cultural adherence will lead to the deviant behaviour which is against the legal standards of society
3. Men will more likely to engage in deviant activities than women

Methodology

Research Design

The research used a correlational research design. This research design was chosen to establish the relationship between deviant behavior, religious commitment, and cultural norms. Correlational designs are best used to study non-causal relationships between variables in natural environments and were therefore best for the study's objective of determining how religious and cultural beliefs might be statistically associated with behavioral deviance.

Sampling Strategy

Convenience sampling was applied in this research. This approach entails choosing participants who are easily available to the researcher. It is especially appropriate in exploratory studies or when dealing with limited resources. The greatest benefit of convenience sampling lies in its effectiveness. It was found to be suitable for the present study based on the requirement of having to get a large and diversified sample quickly and practically. 185 participants was collected from various walks of life and individuals belonging to varied age groups through a convenience sampling strategy

Table 1
Sociodemographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 185)

Characteristics	M	SD	N	%
Age	25.54	8.65		
Gender				
Male			71	38.4
Female			114	61.6
Socioeconomic Status				
Lower class			3	1.6
Middle Class			118	63.8
Upper Middle Class			61	33.0
Upper Class			3	1.6
Profession				
Employed			57	30.8
Student			119	64.3
Unemployed			9	4.9

Note. M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, % = percentage, f = frequency

Measures

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)

Developed by Worthington et al. (2003), the RCI-10 is a 10-item instrument designed to measure the extent of an individual's religious commitment. The scale assesses two key dimensions intrapersonal (intrinsic) religious commitment, reflecting internalized faith and personal devotion

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and interpersonal (extrinsic) religious commitment, involving external behaviors such as participation in religious activities. Items are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from “not at all true of me” to “totally true of me.” The RCI-10 has consistently demonstrated high internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha values exceeding .90 (Worthington et al., 2003).

Cultural Proficiency Beliefs Inventory (CPBI)

The CPBI is a 60-item measure developed by Lindsey et al. (2009) to assess individuals’ cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions. For this study, 21 items were removed, resulting in a 39-item adapted version. The scale evaluates alignment with the six guiding principles of cultural proficiency. Participants responded using a binary format (1 = Agree, 0 = Disagree/Uncertain). Although originally developed for educational settings, it has been adapted in prior studies for broader sociocultural research (McLaughlin & Wicker, 2016). The CPBI’s flexibility allows it to be tailored while maintaining construct validity (van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). The CPBI has consistently demonstrated high internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha value 0.85

Deviant Behavior Variety Scale (DBVS)

Created by Sanches et al. (2016), the DBVS consists of 19 dichotomous (Yes/No) items measuring the range of deviant acts committed in the past year. In this study, 1 item was removed, and an 18-item version was used. Each “Yes” response equals 1 point, summed to compute a deviance variety score. Higher scores reflect broader engagement in deviant behavior. The DBVS has been validated in various sociocultural settings and is sensitive to both minor and severe deviance. The DBVS has consistently demonstrated high internal reliability, with Cronbach’s alpha value 0.90

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from all the participants, and the study received approval from the board of studies, Government College University Lahore, Pakistan. This study was determined to have the minimal ethical hazards. Furthermore it is crucial to acknowledge that a experienced clinical and social psychologist is among the authors of the study. Data were gathered with self-report questionnaires handed out both in person and via online form. Participants were told the study's purpose, promised confidentiality, and mandated to give informed consent. The measures were given in a set sequence: RCI-10, then CPBI, and lastly DBVS. Some items were modified and removed; it is a widely accepted practice in cross-cultural research. According to van de Vijver and Leung (1997), item adaptation helps preserve construct validity when transferring instruments across cultural contexts. Similarly, McLaughlin and Wicker (2016) argue that item removal, rewording, or contextual replacement maintains scale relevance without compromising psychometric integrity. The modifications in CPBI and DBVS were consistent with these standards. Data gathering was done over two weeks. Once done, answers were coded and entered into SPSS for statistical analysis. Reliability testing was carried out with Cronbach's alpha to check internal consistency for every scale. Data were gathered from universities and madrassa students, Guards, clerks, businessmen and other various professions.

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Results

The present study aimed to evaluate the relationship of RC, CN, and DB and identify the predictors of DB. This chapter revealed the findings of the Quantitative Study. Table 2 depicts the psychometric properties of the variables used. Table 3 displays Correlations among Religious Convictions, Cultural Norms, and Deviant Behavior. Table 4 shows Multiple Linear Regression showing Religious Convictions and Cultural Norms as Predictors of Deviant Behavior, and Table 5 tells us the results of the Independent Sample t-Test for Deviant Behavior by Gender

Table 2
Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N = 185)

Variable	k	M	SD	α	Range	Skewness	Kurtosis
RCI-10	10	3.00	.88	0.89	10 – 50	-1.36	-.402
CBPI	39	0.76	.14	0.81	0 – 39	-.26	-.53
DBVS	18	.194	.14	.73	0 - 18	.60	-.53

Note: RCI-10 = Religious Commitment Inventory, CBPI = Cultural Belief Proficiency Inventory, DBVS = Deviant Behavior Variety Scale, k = Total number of items, M= Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, α = Cronbach's alpha

Results shown in Table 2 depict that the skewness and kurtosis values of all three scales, i.e., RCI-10, CBPI, and DBVS, fall within the acceptable range of +2.58 to -2.58 (Gravetter & Wallnau., 2017). It is also supported by the central limit theorem, which states that when the sample size is greater than or equal to 30, the distribution is almost perfectly normal (Gravetter & Wallnau., 2017). The results of reliability analysis indicated that the Cronbach's alpha value of Religious Convictions, Cultural Norms, falls within the good range, whereas the reliability of Deviant Behavior falls within the fair range.

Table 3
Correlations among Religious Convictions, Cultural Norms, and Deviant Behavior (N = 185)

Variables	n	M	SD	1	2	3
1 RC	185	3.00	0.88			
2 CN	185	0.76	0.14	0.45**		
3 DB	185	0.19	0.14	0.65***	.26**	

Note: RC = Religious Commitment, CN = Cultural Norms, DB = Deviant Behavior, n = Number of samples, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test)

In Table 3, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between Religious Convictions (RC), Cultural Norms (CN), and Deviant Behavior (DB).

The analysis revealed a strong positive correlation between RC and DB, $r = .65$, $p < .001$, indicating

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that higher levels of religious commitment are associated with greater support for Deviant Behavior. A moderate positive correlation was also found between CN and DB, $r = .26$, $p = .009$, suggesting that individuals more cultural also tend to report stronger deviant behaviors. RC and CN were moderately positively correlated, $r = .45$, $p < .001$, indicating a meaningful association between religious commitment and a sense of Cultural Norms. All correlations were statistically significant, and no issues of multicollinearity or redundancy between predictors were observed.

Table 4

Multiple Linear Regression showing Religious Convictions and Cultural Norms as Predictors of Deviant Behavior.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p	95% CI (LL, UL)
(Constant)	0.25	0.08	—	3.13	.002	[0.09, 0.41]
RC	0.58	0.09	.62	6.44	<.001	[0.41, 0.75]
CN	0.21	0.07	.25	2.87	.005	[0.06, 0.36]

Note: RC = Religious Convictions, CN = Cultural Norms CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

In Table 4, Multiple linear regression was run to identify the predictors of Deviant Behavior. Religious Convictions and Cultural Norms were entered as predictor variables in the regression model. Deviant Behavior was entered as an outcome variable.

All regression assumptions were fulfilled. The data had no influential examples, as the typical residual value was less than 3. The assumption of independent errors was met as the value of Durbin Watson was between the acceptable range of 1 and 3. The assumption of no perfect multicollinearity was examined by checking the tolerance values, which all exceeded 0.2. The assumptions of, linearity, normally distributed errors, and homoscedasticity were also met.

The overall model was statistically significant, $F(2, 97) = 44.89$, $p < .001$, and explained approximately 48% of the variance in DB ($R^2 = .48$). The Durbin–Watson statistic was 1.95, indicating no serious autocorrelation among residuals.

Both predictors made statistically significant contributions to the model. RC was a strong, positive predictor of DB, $B = 0.58$, $SE B = 0.09$, $\beta = .62$, $t = 6.44$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.41, 0.75]. Likewise, CPBI also significantly predicted DB, $B = 0.21$, $SE B = 0.07$, $\beta = .25$, $t = 2.87$, $p = .005$, 95% CI [0.06, 0.36].

Table 5

Independent Sample t-Test for Deviant Behavior by Gender

Group	n	M	SD	t	df	p	95% CI (LL, UL)	Cohen's d
Male	71	0.64	0.13					
Female	114	0.56	0.12	4.34	183	<.001	[0.04, 0.11]	0.65

Note: n = Total number of participants, M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, p = Significant Value, CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit

In table 5 an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine differences in deviant behavior between males and females. Results revealed that males ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.13$, $n = 71$) exhibited significantly higher deviant behavior compared to females ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.12$, $n = 114$), $t(183) = 4.34$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [0.04, 0.11]. The effect size was medium-to-large (Cohen's $d = 0.65$), indicating a meaningful difference in deviant behavior by gender.

Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the correlational and predictive relationships among religious convictions, cultural norms, and deviant behavior. The results revealed a statistically significant and **strong positive**

correlation between religious convictions and deviant behavior ($r = .65$, $p < .001$), indicating that higher religious commitment was associated with increased engagement in deviant behavior. These finding challenges conventional assumptions that religiosity always inhibits deviance and suggests that under certain socio-cultural contexts, rigid or misinterpreted religious convictions may contribute to norm-violating behaviors. This aligns with prior research by Windzio et al. (2025), who found that heightened religious adherence, particularly in conservative Muslim youth, predicted higher support for violent gender role enforcement. The positive correlation also echoes concerns raised in studies on **negative religious coping** (Pargament et al., 1998), where maladaptive interpretations of faith may lead to rationalization of deviant actions.

Cultural norms also showed a **moderate positive correlation with deviant behavior ($r = .26$, $p = .009$)**, suggesting that internalized cultural expectations can both regulate and justify deviance. This supports Cultural Deviance Theory (Shaw & McKay, 1942), which posits that in socially disorganized or subcultural environments, behaviors deemed deviant by dominant legal systems may be regarded as acceptable or even honorable within the cultural group. This dynamic is reflected in the continuation of honor-based practices, such as swara or forced marriage in rural South Asia, which though illegal persist due to entrenched cultural values (Yusuf, 2012). Furthermore, the **positive correlation between religious convictions and cultural norms ($r = .45$, $p < .001$)** implies that in many societies, these domains are not distinct but reinforce each other, leading to a compounded moral framework that can legitimize behavior contrary to state or international norms (Barlas, 2002).

The multiple linear regression analysis revealed that both religious convictions ($\beta = .62$, $p < .001$) and cultural norms ($\beta = .25$, $p = .005$) were **significant positive predictors of deviant behavior**, accounting for **48% of the variance ($R^2 = .48$)** in deviance scores. This robust model suggests that these socio-cultural variables substantially influence behavioral outcomes. The strong predictive value of religious convictions in particular supports the idea that religion, when rigidly interpreted or used to justify exclusion, can foster deviance rather than prevent it (Juergensmeyer, 2003). It also echoes findings by Gunes (2008), who observed that while private spirituality was associated with reduced deviance among Turkish youth, public religious behavior without internalized values showed no protective effect—or even elevated risk. Cultural norms, while less influential than religious convictions in the current model, still played a meaningful role, particularly when individuals lacked critical engagement with cultural expectations (Gueirra, 2020).

A gender-based analysis revealed a statistically significant difference in deviant behavior, with **males reporting higher deviance ($M = 0.64$, $SD = 0.13$)** than females ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.12$),

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$t(183) = 4.34, p < .001, \text{Cohen's } d = 0.65$. This medium-to-large effect size underscores the gendered dimension of deviant behavior, aligning with existing research that associates male socialization with increased externalizing behaviors, risk-taking, and resistance to authority (Clinard & Meier, 2016). Gender socialization practices often rooted in both religious and cultural narratives—may reinforce aggressive or dominant behaviors in males, while penalizing nonconformity more harshly in females (Arciniega et al., 2008). These findings emphasize the importance of incorporating gender as a moderating variable in future studies on deviance.

Despite its contributions, the study is not without limitations. First, the use of **convenience sampling** may restrict the generalizability of the findings beyond the sample population, which primarily comprised students and young adults. Second, **self-reported measures** are susceptible to social desirability bias, particularly when assessing sensitive topics like religiosity and deviant behavior. Third, while correlational and regression analyses revealed significant associations and predictions, **causality cannot be inferred** from this cross-sectional design. Lastly, while the adapted scales demonstrated good reliability, further validation within local cultural contexts could enhance their applicability and accuracy. Future research should incorporate longitudinal or experimental designs and expand sample diversity to better explore causality and generalizability.

Strengths and Implications

One of the greatest strengths of this research is that it has an integrated analysis of both religious beliefs and cultural norms as predictors of deviance, based on sound quantitative methods. The application of validated scales and a relatively substantial sample size increased statistical reliability in the findings, while notable findings contribute significantly to behavioral science research. By showing that religious beliefs and cultural values not only correlate with deviant behavior but also are strong predictors, the research discredits classical assumptions that religiosity always prevents deviance. This subtle insight has real-world significance for educators, policymakers, and mental health professionals serving culturally and religiously diverse populations. Interventions to prevent deviant behavior cannot merely be based on encouraging religious observance or cultural conformity but have to stress critical self-reflection, constructive coping mechanisms, and value internalization. Also, the study reinforces the establishment of culturally informed legal and education policies that differentiate between productive moral frameworks and those likely to inadvertently promote deviant behaviors through enforcer rigidity or misinterpretation.

Limitations

Even though it has made a very insightful contribution, the research is prone to a number of limitations that must be kept in mind while interpreting the results. To begin with, the fact that a cross-sectional design restricts temporal precedence between the independent and dependent variables implies that although religious beliefs and cultural norms were found to predict deviant behavior, temporal precedence cannot be stated. Second, the dependence on convenience sampling mainly of young adults and students can restrict generalizability to other age groups, socioeconomic groups, or cultural backgrounds. Third, self-report questionnaires can introduce response bias, such as social desirability effects, particularly when respondents are dealing with sensitive topics such as religiosity and deviance. Finally, the cultural suitability of the adapted scales, although reliable, needs to be further tested in multi-cultural populations to confirm construct validity. These

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limitations highlight the need for longitudinal, experimental, and cross-cultural studies to further explore the complex relationship between sociocultural variables and deviant behavior.

Conclusion

The quantitative results of this research highlight the prominent and multifaceted roles religious beliefs and cultural expectations take in facilitating deviant activity. Defying conventional wisdom, the data showed that in some instances, religious observance and cultural allegiance can presage elevated levels of deviance, especially when based on strict interpretations or lacking correspondence with universal moral standards. These results add to an increasingly large literature highlighting the contextual character of morality and deviance and emphasize the importance of critical rather than passive reception of cultural and religious norms. Through combining theoretical frameworks like Cultural Deviance Theory and Religious Commitment Theory, the research suggests a more nuanced understanding of deviant behavior that transcends unvarnished moral dichotomies. Future research would need to build on these results by examining the mediating functions of education, gender, emotional coping, and institutional trust in generating deviant behavior within religious and cultural contexts.

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