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CORRELATIONS OF MORAL INJURY AMONG PAKISTANI LAWYERS

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Abstract

Introduction: *According to Litz et al., moral injury is the commission of, inability to prevent, observation of, or knowledge of acts that violate strongly held moral principles and standards. The current study contributed to a better understanding of psychological well-being in the legal profession by examining the relationships between moral harm among lawyers and pathological lying, decisional tiredness, and religiosity.*

Method: *A cross-sectional, quantitative research design was used. A purposeful sample of practicing lawyers selected from Pakistan's district, high, and supreme courts were given standardized measures of pathological lying, decisional weariness, religiosity, and moral harm. The direction, strength, and predictive value of the associations between the independent variables and moral harm were evaluated through the use of Pearson correlation analysis.*

Results: *Analysis showed a strong positive relationship between moral injury and pathological lying, indicating that continuous dishonesty increases moral conflict and distress even though it is frequently the result of adversarial behavior. Indicating that constant decision-making demands weaken ethical resilience and heighten susceptibility to moral strain, decisional tiredness was likewise significantly correlated with moral injury. There was a slight positive connection between religiosity and moral injury, which was contrary to the prediction of a protective effect. As a result, religious practices and beliefs may be consoling, but they may also exacerbate internal conflict when work obligations collide with moral or spiritual values.*

Conclusions: *The research indicates that while religiosity has a complicated and conflicting impact, pathological lying and decisional exhaustion are important causes of moral harm among attorneys. In Pakistan, these findings have ramifications for professional training, legal education, and institutional reforms. The findings also emphasize the significance of taking religious and cultural factors into account when addressing moral damage in the legal field.*

INTRODUCTION

Maintaining a positive self-image incorporates several self-constructs that impact various facets of human functioning, making it vital for human well-being. Moral identity is one of many factors that influence decision-making, motivates an individual to engage in particular behaviors, and represents values, ideas, and attitudes about what is good and wrong. Every human being has moral systems and perceptions of

right and wrong. Most people frequently have to make decisions that are inconsistent with their moral principles and ideals; they must be able to justify, explain, or even consider the psychological, emotional, or physical harm that these decisions entail in order to keep a positive attitude toward themselves (Bandura, 2002).

The term "moral injury" (MI) was initially used as a framework to assist veterans, service personnel, and their mental health professionals in understanding wartime experiences that went against their moral principles and could not be neatly classified as behavioral or psychiatric problems (Nelson et al., 2022). Rather than being a diagnosable diagnosis, MI is regarded as a syndrome linked to clinically significant psychological suffering, elevated suicidal ideation, and a number of mental illnesses, including depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) (Williamson et al., 2018). Similar to the distinction between PTSD and acute stress disorder, moral damage is defined as the immediate response to potentially morally harmful events (PMIEs), while MI is the ongoing suffering brought on by exposure to PMIEs.

In the context of the military, PMIEs are isolated, infrequent occurrences that are beyond an individual's control and negatively impact their capacity for meaning-making or personal integrity (Riedel et al., 2022). According to Litz et al., MI is "the act of committing, failing to prevent, witnessing, or learning about acts that violate deeply held moral beliefs and expectations" (p. 700). The affected individual or those around them may commit PMIEs, such as unintentional or unjustified killings of others or failure to stop injury to people (Norman et al., 2023), or they may be betrayed and show a lack of support to those they trust.

According to Tangney et al. (2007), moral injury involving the experience of negative moral emotions such as guilt, shame, and wrath can impact future behavioral decision-making and offer rapid feedback as a result (or in anticipation) of our own or others' behavior. Moral pain is a form of punishment that discourages someone from acting in a way that is contrary to their moral code, such as committing crimes, cheating, stealing, or indulging in interpersonal violence.

Decisional Fatigue

An adult in the United States is thought to make 35,000 decisions every day (Sollisch 2016). Although some of these daily choices may appear harmless, a growing corpus of research suggests that decision-making may have detrimental effects on behavior control and the caliber of decisions that follow. The inability to make decisions and regulate behavior as a result of recurrent decision-making is referred to as decision fatigue. According to evidence, people who are feeling decision fatigue tend to make decisions that appear impulsive or unreasonable, have trouble making trade-offs, and prefer to play a passive part in the decision-making process (Tierney 2011).

Baumeister et al. (1998) proposed the Strength Model of Self-Control, which is where the idea of decision fatigue originates. Their model's fundamental assumption is that people's ability to control their conduct is limited. Humans use internal resources to accomplish acts of self-regulation, such processing information to make a decision, in a manner similar to how muscles tire after exertion. Ego depletion is defined as the state in which internal resources (executive function, emotion control) are diminished (Baumeister et al., 1998).

Research by Vohs et al. (2008) indicates that decision-making may cause ego depletion. Those who are suffering ego-depletion may be susceptible to the cognitive, psychological, and behavioral manifestations of decision fatigue. Based on our knowledge of the literature, decision fatigue is a symptom or phenotypic expression of ego-depletion. Inzlicht and Schmeichel (2012) offer a Process Model of Ego-Depletion in addition to the Strength Model of Self-Control. According to this explanation, behavioral motivation and attentional regulatory changes are the cause of the ego-depletion effect. Particularly, motivational changes that intensify impulsivity and attentional deficiencies that impair one's capacity to identify internal conflicts or inconsistencies that would typically signal behavior modification are the causes of ego-depletion symptoms, also known as decision fatigue.

Moral Injury and Decisional Fatigue

A crucial component of legal practice that has drawn more attention in the literature on professional

burnout is the relationship between moral injury and decisional fatigue. According to writer John Tierney, the serial hearing and decision-making procedure caused "decision fatigue," which increased the likelihood that the board would refuse parole later in the day (Tierney, 2011). This occurrence demonstrates how the ongoing need for intricate decision-making can exhaust mental faculties and impede judgment in legal situations.

Lawyers are among the most vulnerable professionals to burnout, and studies on the subject show that lawyers' burnout levels rose with workload but fell with decision latitude (Nickum et al., 2023). This research implies that attorneys are more vulnerable to moral harm and decisional fatigue when they have a large workload and little control over their decision-making procedures (Torres & Williams, 2022).

In the practice of law, decision fatigue can take several forms, all of which can lead to moral harm. According to Baumeister and Tierney (2011), lawyers who have their cognitive resources depleted are less able to engage in rigorous ethical reasoning, which may result in decisions that cause moral discomfort later on. According to Dickens et al. (2019), decision-makers who are exhausted often have a tendency to use shortcuts and heuristics that lower their moral standards. Third, lawyers may experience moral harm as a result of the ongoing stress of decision-making, which can weaken their sense of professional identity and personal agency. The quality of judicial decision-making is impacted by decision fatigue, as evidenced by research showing judges produce less favorable results toward the end of a session than at the start (Torres & Williams, 2022). This widespread exhaustion produces circumstances that impair moral judgment, which may result in deeds that transgress individual ethical norms and exacerbate feelings of moral damage (Vohs et al., 2008). According to psychological research, the quality of decisions decreases after a lengthy period of deliberation. This phenomenon has significant ramifications for legal practitioners who are required to uphold ethical standards during lengthy workdays.

Religiosity

People's behavior has been found to be significantly impacted by religion. Individual behavior is the cornerstone that influences societal and communal behavior as a whole. Religion also has an impact on spiritual or religious coping mechanisms, which are important in alleviating the person's issues (Raiya et al., 2015). Significantly unfavorable life circumstances are likely to trigger an individual's commitment to a particular belief system, claims Corsini (2009). God could be viewed in these situations as a safe haven that is used for coping. Religious beliefs are particularly relevant since they affect how people perceive their coping mechanisms and how they react to stressors (Pargament, 1997). The beliefs of Islam are not the same as those stated by Pargament (1997) and others. It has a distinct impact on Muslims' lives generally and on the populations that require extra support specifically. In this regard, the nearby religious communities and localities are also quite important. According to Ho and Ho (2007), religiosity is defined as a combination of customs, emotions, beliefs, and behaviors associated with a specific religion. Religion is a psychological and behavioral phenomenon in which a believer holds and practices particular kinds of beliefs, according to Delener (2000). According to other researchers, this phenomenon can predict a person's cognitive judgmental processes (Francis et al., 2014). The two fundamental components of religiosity were belief and practice, according to AlMarri et al. (2009). A person who does not hold any beliefs is not considered religious. The fundamental tenets upon which the entire religion rests are its beliefs. In a same vein, it is imperative to observe the fundamental practices of Islam. Muslims must observe these rites (prayer, fasting, and the Quran); hence, a person's religiosity will be called into doubt if they do not.

Religiosity and Moral Injury

A complex paradox that calls into question accepted notions about the protective function of religious beliefs is the relationship between moral harm and religiosity among lawyers. Initially discussed in relation to military personnel's violation of moral principles and values during times of war, moral injury has broadened to encompass comparable feelings experienced by first responders, healthcare providers, and other individuals experiencing moral emotions as a result of actions or observations made

during traumatic events or circumstances (Litz et al., 2009). Since lawyers frequently encounter moral conundrums that contradict their basic convictions, this expansion is especially pertinent to the legal field. Religion can be protective, but it can also exacerbate moral harm when people believe their behavior goes against their moral or religious convictions (Benavides et al., 2018). When religious practitioners are compelled to engage in morally dubious professional behaviors, like defending clients they believe to be guilty or taking part in legal tactics that go against their religious beliefs, they become more distressed (Shepherd et al., 2019). This relationship is evident for lawyers.

Religiously devoted people may experience internal conflict as a result of the legal profession's frequent requirement that lawyers separate their personal convictions from their professional responsibilities. Bivariate analyses showed that religiosity was negatively correlated with moral harm in veteran populations; however, this protective effect might not apply to legal professionals, whose moral conflicts are very different (Benavides et al., 2018).Because their faith-based moral framework gives them a clear standard by which to judge their professional acts, religious lawyers may suffer more severe moral injury (Litz et al., 2009). This makes the legal profession distinctive in its moral issues. Moral damage symptoms, such as guilt, humiliation, and spiritual sorrow, can arise from cognitive dissonance that arises when practicing law necessitates actions that go against religion beliefs about justice, truth, or compassion.

Pathological Lying

Pathological lying, commonly referred to as mythomania or pseudologia fantastica, is a psychological disorder or persistent pattern of obsessive or habitual lying. A number of mental illnesses, including factitious disorder, narcissistic personality disorder, and antisocial personality disorder, can cause it (Dike, 2008). In contrast to ordinary lying, which may be driven by self-interest, pathological lying frequently takes place in the absence of a clear objective or outside benefit. Because of its intricate psychological, emotional, and social aspects, this phenomenon has captivated psychologists for decades.

Pathological lying—also referred to as compulsive or chronic lying—is a severe problem that affects the criminal justice system, relationships with others, mental health, and other domains. In interpersonal interactions, pathological lying can seriously damage relationships, leading to social isolation, emotional distress, and a lack of trust. Since persistent dishonesty begets betrayal and estrangement, compulsive lying gradually erodes the foundation of relationships, both personal and professional (Ford & King, 1985). For the legal and criminal justice systems, pathological lying poses significant challenges. In this case, people may fabricate stories to deceive investigators or sway court rulings, which would hinder inquiries and court cases. When dealing with pathological liars, law enforcement and legal professionals may find it difficult to distinguish fact from fiction.

This is especially troublesome when it comes to psychological testing and criminal profiling (Gergen & Gergen, 1988). According to Dike (2008), pathological lying is commonly associated with personality disorders such as borderline personality disorder (BPD), narcissistic personality disorder (NPD), and antisocial personality disorder (ASPD). Its identification is crucial for a precise diagnosis and treatment plan because it has been linked to psychological disorders and factitious diseases. Medical professionals may fail to diagnose the underlying condition or provide the proper therapy, which could lead to poor treatment outcomes.

Pathological Lying and Moral Injury

One of the most alarming features of professional dysfunction in the legal industry is the connection between compulsive lying and moral harm among attorneys. According to research, pathological liars reported lying on average 10 times a day, which is more than a normative sample would say. This suggests that dishonest behavior may be more common in high-pressure professional settings like the legal profession (Garrett et al., 2016). In legal situations, pathological lying may be a maladaptive coping strategy used to address moral discomfort.

Dishonesty may offer momentary solace from psychological distress when attorneys encounter a contradiction between their personal ideals and professional responsibilities (Yang et al., 2005). But

in the end, this coping mechanism makes moral harm worse by generating more ethical transgressions and widening the discrepancy between one's behavior and beliefs. Investigating and measuring the intricate connection of pathological lying, decisional fatigue, religiosity with moral injury among Pakistani lawyers is the main objective of this study.

The purpose of this research is to determine how religiosity may act as a protective barrier against moral harm, but maladaptive behaviors like pathological lying and psychological conditions like decisional fatigue may make people more susceptible to moral injury. By examining these dynamics in the legal field, the study intends to add to the expanding corpus of research on moral harm at work outside of the military and medical fields by placing it within Pakistan's sociocultural and ethical norms.

Hypothesis

Moral injury would be positively correlated with pathological lying.

Moral injury would be positively correlated with decisional fatigue.

Moral injury would be negatively correlated with religiosity.

Method

Study design and participants

The study obtained ethical approval from the University of Sargodha, Department of Psychology and Institutional Review Board. All procedures were carried out with sufficient knowledge. Study participants were approached using convenience sampling, and data was gathered using a Google document. There were 225 participants in the study, ranging in age from 18 to over 40. The participants received an informed consent form prior to participation and were guaranteed the privacy of their answers. They were given the choice to deny participation and were told that their answers would only be utilized for research. Respondents were asked to give sincere and unique answers.

Instruments

Moral Injury Scale (Mazhar & Ghayas,2025)

Moral Injury Scale was developed by Mazhar & Ghayas (2025). This Scale comprised of 12 items that assess the level of moral injury among lawyers. It has three subscales. The first subscale is betrayal that comprised 4 items. The second subscale is transgression that comprised 4 items. The third subscale is value system conflict that comprised 4 items It is five-point Likert scale, with 0 indicating "never" and 4 indicating "always". The coefficient alpha of this scale was 0.78. Higher score on this scale indicates higher level of moral injury among lawyers and vice versa.

Pathological Lying Inventory (Curtis & Hart, 2024)

The 19-item (PLI) was used to assess pathological lying tendencies. It has three subscales and was scored on a 1– 7 anchored rating scale where 1=strongly disagree and 7=strongly agree. In this study, the Cronbach's alpha for the overall PLI was 0.94. Higher score on this scale indicates higher level of pathological lying and vice versa.

Short Muslim Practice and Belief Scale (AlMarri et al., 2009).

The participants' level of religiosity was assessed using the Short Muslim Practice and Belief Scale (AlMarri et al., 2009). It has nine items with two components: belief (5 items) and practice (4 items). The practice subscale's response format is five points. The response format of the belief subscale ranges from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree, while the Likert scale goes from 1 = "I never do this" to 5 = "I always do this." The scale was determined to be a valid and reliable indicator of religiosity, with an alpha reliability of .83.

Decisional Fatigue Scale (Hickman et al., 2018)

Respondent decision fatigue was measured by the Decision Fatigue Scale (DFS), a 9-item, unidimensional, self-report measure. On a four-point Likert scale, ranging from 0(strongly disagree) to 3 (strongly agree) items are assessed. The sum of the items yields a total score between 0 and 27, where higher values indicate more decision fatigue. The scale had an alpha reliability of.95.

Statistical Analysis

The data analysis procedure included calculating descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation. The relationships between the variables

were examined using Pearson correlation coefficients and SPSS version 26.

Results

Table 1

Pearson Correlation of MI with related scales(N=100)

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. MI	1			
2. DF	.49**	1		
3.SMPBS	.16	-.21*	1	
4. PLS	.50**	.46**	.06	1

Abbreviations: MI, Moral Injury; DF, Decisional Fatigue; SMBPS, Short Muslim Practice and Belief; PLS, Pathological Lying

The Pearson product–moment correlations between pathological lying (PLS), decisional fatigue (DF), moral injury (MI), and religiosity as assessed by the Short Muslim Practice and Belief Scale (SMPBS) are shown in Table 2. As demonstrated, there was a substantial and positive correlation between MI and both DF (r =.49, p <.01) and PLS (r =.50, p <.01), indicating that greater moral harm is linked to higher degrees of decisional tiredness and pathological lying. However, there was week positive correlation between MI and SMPBS religiosity (r =.16, p >.05).

Table 2

Coefficient Alpha, Standard Deviation, Mean, and Descriptive of Death Moral Injury Scale, Pathological Lying Scale, Decisional Fatigue Scale, Short Muslim Practice and Belief Scale(N=100)

Scale	M	SD	Range	A
Moral Injury Scale	31.68	8.52	12-55	.72
Pathological Lying Scale	98.67	43.97	30-203	.94
Decisional Fatigue Scale	16.94	4.48	9-26	.83
Short Muslim Practice and Belief Scale	34.11	5.44	16-43	.79

Table 2 shows mean, standard deviation, and reliability of the measures employed in this study. The alpha reliability of all coefficients were > .70.

Discussion

The purpose of this study is to examine how psychological and behavioral factors specifically pathological lying and decisional fatigue—along with the personal and spiritual dimension of religiosity, are related to the experience of moral injury among lawyers. Given that lawyers frequently operate in ethically complex environments where professional obligations may conflict with personal values, understanding these relationships is essential. This study seeks to determine whether pathological lying contributes to higher levels of moral injury by creating dissonance between professional conduct and personal morality and to explore how decisional fatigue, resulting from continuous high-stakes decision-making, influences susceptibility to moral injury.

The first hypothesis which proposed a significant positive relationship between moral injury and pathological lying which was supported by various researches. For legal professionals experiencing moral injury, increased deceptive behaviors may represent an attempt to maintain professional functioning while managing internal ethical conflicts (Curtis, 2018). This creates a destructive cycle where lying behaviors further compromise professional integrity and increase moral distress. The relationship between pathological lying and moral injury may also be bidirectional, where initial moral injuries create vulnerability to deceptive behaviors, which then generate additional moral conflicts and psychological distress. Studies demonstrate that

individuals classified as pathological liars show distinct patterns of behavior and cognition that can interfere with professional functioning and ethical decision-making (Garrett et al., 2016). This pattern suggests that interventions addressing moral injury should also consider the potential for associated deceptive behaviors and their impact on professional functioning in legal settings.

The second hypothesis of the present study was the significant positive relationship between decisional fatigue and moral injury. Lawyers are among the professionals most at risk of suffering from burnout, and research in legal profession burnout indicates that the level of burnout among lawyers decreased with decision latitude but increased with workload (Nickum et al., 2023). This finding suggests that when lawyers experience high caseloads with limited autonomy over their decision-making processes, they become more susceptible to both decisional fatigue and moral injury (Torres & Williams, 2022).

The third hypothesis of the study anticipated a positive relationship between religiosity and moral injury. In veteran populations, religiosity was inversely related to moral injury in bivariate analyses, but this protective effect may not translate directly to legal professionals where the nature of moral conflicts differs significantly (Benavides et al., 2018). Contrary to this expectation, the current study revealed a weak positive correlation between religiosity and moral injury among lawyers. Since the items were related to beliefs and practices, it is likely that this is why MI was not substantially correlated with SMPBS religiosity ($r = .16$, $p > .05$). People might suffer moral harm even if they are not religious because they have moral values that have developed via their society. The one possible explanation is that the weak positive correlation may indicate that while religiosity does not strongly exacerbate moral injury for all lawyers, it can serve as a double-edged sword. For some, religious teachings provide meaning and forgiveness, reducing moral distress; for others, rigid moral codes may intensify perceptions of wrongdoing and hinder self-forgiveness. Secondly the nature of items being used in a scale to measure religiosity encompasses of beliefs and practices. Another contributing factor could be the nature of the legal profession itself.

Limitations

The sample may not accurately reflect the diversity of Pakistan's legal profession as a whole because it was restricted to attorneys from particular courts, cities, or practice areas.

It is possible that the scale did not fully reflect the multifaceted nature of religiosity (e.g., intrinsic vs. extrinsic orientation, spiritual coping), but it did evaluate religiosity in terms of beliefs and behaviors.

The inclusion of self-report measures for pathological lying, decisional weariness, religiosity, and moral harm increases the risk of social desirability bias in a profession where reputation and credibility are important.

Particularly in a field where credibility and reputation are crucial, the use of self-report measures for pathological lying, decisional fatigue, religiosity, and moral injury raises the possibility of social desirability bias. To conform to socially acceptable standards, lawyers may overstate their religion or underreport their propensity for lying.

The study was carried out among Pakistani lawyers, who have different religious beliefs, legal systems, and cultural standards. Findings may not be generalizable to the lawyers in other nations with distinct legal systems or secular professional cultures might not be able to apply the findings.

Suggestions

To make sure the results are more representative and generalizable, future studies should involve attorneys from other parts of Pakistan and from a variety of legal specialties, such as criminal, corporate, family, and constitutional.

Future research should use longitudinal designs that monitor the evolution of moral harm in connection to pathological lying, exhaustion, and religious devotion in order to gain a deeper understanding of causality.

Examine courses, stress-reduction seminars, or counseling services that assist attorneys in overcoming decision fatigue, upholding their moral principles, and balancing their religious convictions with their professional obligations.

To determine whether the ties seen are unique to Pakistan's socioreligious and legal setting or a component of larger trends in the legal profession, compare lawyers from other nations.

Implications

This study emphasizes the significance of comprehending the ways in which pathological lying, decisional fatigue, and religiosity intersect with moral harm in the legal profession, regardless of the direction or intensity of the associations discovered. These elements' existence in lawyers' working lives indicates the necessity for multifaceted treatments. A person's risk of moral harm can be decreased by developing moral resilience, controlling stress, and seeking counseling. It is imperative that organizations like law firms and bar councils incorporate ethical training, caseload regulation, and support services in order to foster mental health and professional integrity.

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