

Research Article

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Taqwa, Spiritual Shame, and Divine Forgiveness in Islam

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Abstract

Background. The present study aimed to investigate the influence of taqwa on divine forgiveness moderated by spiritual shame in Pakistani adult Muslims.

Method. A convenient sample of 329 women and 206 men ($N = 535$) Pakistani adult Muslims (age range 19-75 years; $M = 30.68$ years, $SD = 11.92$ years) from Sargodha, Lahore, and Rawalpindi was recruited. We collected data using Urdu-translated versions of the Taqwa Scale (Nazam et al., 2022), the Divine Forgiveness Scale (Fincham & May, 2022), the offense-related shame subscale that was taken from the Offense-related Shame and Guilt Scale (Wright & Gudjonsson, 2007) in a cross-sectional survey design.

Results. Data were analyzed with SPSS and moderation analysis by PROCESS macro (Model 1) for SPSS. Findings revealed significant main and interaction effects of taqwa and spiritual shame on divine forgiveness. Analysis of the conditional effects revealed that spiritual shame strengthened the positive association between taqwa and divine forgiveness.

Conclusion. By revealing how spiritual shame can augment the relationship between taqwa and seeking divine absolution, the research provides valuable insights into one of the mechanisms of forgiveness in Islamic theology, emphasizing the role of self-reflection, repentance, and emotional states in establishing a relation with the divine.

Keywords. Taqwa, repentance, spiritual shame, divine forgiveness



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Introduction

Muslim religious experiences include the intricate interplay of *taqwa* (تقوى) or piety or Allah-consciousness, divine forgiveness (مغفرت الہی), and spiritual shame (توبہ) or repentance. Muslims, like other believers (like Jews but not Christians, see Fincham & May 2023a), seek divine forgiveness with *taqwa* using spiritual shame or repentance. Requesting divine forgiveness is the cornerstone of religious thought in Islam and transcends religious affiliations and cultural boundaries. Spiritual shame thus is a profound endeavor that surpasses egotistical shame and builds a relationship with Allah, becoming Allah-conscious. *Taqwa* urges Muslims to cultivate an elevated awareness of Allah, to navigate personal and societal pitfalls, and to gain righteousness with assurance. Muslims believe spiritual shame strengthens the relationship between *taqwa* and divine forgiveness, however, this relationship is not psychometrically assessed in Pakistani Muslims. This study investigates the role of *taqwa* on divine forgiveness and asks the question of how spiritual shame adds to the strength of the bond between *taqwa* and divine forgiveness in these Muslims.

Taqwa

Taqwa is derived from the Arabic root *t-q-y* (تقی), which means 'to protect or preserve oneself' (Khatami & Tawa, 2015) or the Arabic root *waqā* (واقى) meaning staying away from all acts that are forbidden (Ohlander, 2005), or fearing commands of Allah (Kamil et al., 2010), or being aware of the duties towards Him (Rahman & Shah, 2015). *Taqwa* is a central concept in Islamic theology and ethics, often translated as *piety*, *godliness*, or *consciousness of God*. It refers to a state of mind and heart in which a believer is constantly aware of Allah and seeks to live a righteous and virtuous life in accordance with Islamic principles. *Taqwa* is a vital provision in the worldly journey of a Muslim. Allah says in the Quran "And take provisions, but indeed, the best provision is *taqwa*. So, fear Me, O you of understanding" (Al-Quran, 2:197). That is why *taqwa* is pivotal to a spiritual relationship with God (Triyuwono, 2016).

Taqwa embodies awareness and mindfulness of Allah, His omnipresence, and His divine essence. Believers trust His benevolence and understand

Allah steers them away from transgressions that might invoke His displeasure or retribution (Qutob, 1986). This state is characterized by an emotional cognizance of God's nearness, influencing divine retribution and approval (Hawa, 2004). Wahab (2017) suggests that *taqwa* serves as a deterrent against actions that contravene God's edicts; and adds fear of Allah stops followers from doing sinful deeds (Hamid, 2003). It acts as a shield for the heart, safeguarding believers from estrangement from Allah, and amassing deeds that draw believers near Him (Topbas, 2009). Expanding on this, Khwajah (2012) adds, that *taqwa* is a reverential fear of God, invoking deeds like respecting parents and loyalty to a spouse, and compassion, benevolence, forgiveness, justice, and kindness towards others, and ascetic practices like humility, self-discipline, and patience.

Divine Forgiveness

Divine forgiveness in Islam refers to seeking pardon from Allah absolving sins and wrongdoings, a central concept that exists in many other religious traditions. Divine forgiveness is sought because Allah is there to forgive, His attributes like mercy, compassion, and the willingness to forgive are there for those who genuinely repent and seek forgiveness. Muslims strongly believe in these divine attributes and expect Allah to be Compassionate, Unforgiving, and Most Merciful. The Quran says, "O My servants who have transgressed [by sinning] against themselves, do not despair of the mercy of Allah. Indeed, Allah forgives all sins. Indeed, it is He who is the Forgiving, the Merciful" (Al-Quran, 39:53). Islam considers seeking divine forgiveness to be a fundamental purgative process that leads to removal of sins (Ayoub, 1997).

Fincham (2020) asserts God possesses the authority to absolve sins, and when divine pardon is bestowed it influences the individual in the temporal realm and beyond. Divine forgiveness functions as a catalyst for moral and spiritual growth (Exline & Rose, 2013) and when not given, retards spiritual growth and psychological well-being (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001). God's forgiveness is flawless, it erases misdeeds and offers a chance for genuine transformation of the forgiven individual, contrasted with mundane forgiveness that does not transform the seeker but changes the forgiver (Fincham &

May, 2023a). Additionally, those who are divinely forgiven, are characterized by total eradication of negative sentiments towards the offender, a feat that is difficult to achieve when ordinary forgiveness is sought from others often observed with lingering resentments (Wade & Worthington, 2003). Seeking forgiveness from the divine restores the relationship with God, as forgiveness or *tawbah* is inherently reconciliatory (Fincham & May, 2023b).

Tahir (2018) suggests divine forgiveness is a fundamental aspect of Islam with ingrained tenets that include, creed (عقيدة), jurisprudence (فقه), and as a devotional practice (عبادة). The pursuit of divine forgiveness is not only a formal act but a spiritual journey of self or ego purification (تزكية) that takes place within the heart. This is echoed in the Qur'an: "And turn to Allah in spiritual shame, all of you, O believers, that you might succeed" (Al-Qur'an, 24:31) where success implies purification, Qur'an adds, "Indeed, Allah loves those who are constantly repentant and loves those who purify themselves" (Al-Qur'an, 2:222). Allah urges Muslims [paraphrased] to implore for forgiveness, repent, so that their prayers are heard, and mercy is assured (Al-Qur'an, 11:61). These verses point to the fact, seeking divine forgiveness is not just ritualistic but a deep facet of Muslim life, which reflects strength of faith.

Spiritual Shame

Shame is a complex emotional response that arises when an individual violates a moral or social standard, resulting in a sense of worthlessness, and negative sense of self (Tangney & Dearing, 2002). Unlike guilt, which is caused by a specific immoral action and reparative behavior, shame involves a global negative assessment of the self (Lewis, 1971). When individuals experience shame, they often feel exposed and worry about how others perceive them. This emotional state causes a desire to hide or disappear, frequently accompanied with feelings of powerlessness and a diminished sense of self-worth (Tangney et al., 1996). Shame can be particularly damaging because it does not only relate to the offense, but it extends to the individual's entire sense of self, often resulting in a pervasive feeling of inadequacy (Tangney et al., 2007).

Shame that results from committing sins is

termed as "spiritual shame," with complex and profound emotions, where transgressions, against the Divine, divine law or religious standards, are reflected upon with deep sorrow and penitence. This form of shame is deeply embedded in many religious ideologies, distinguished from secular shame by an intrinsic connection to the divine or the sacred (Pargament, 1997). Spiritual shame encompasses a profound sense of unworthiness and moral failure (Tangney, 2000), and wretched standing in a spiritual or cosmic order.

Spiritual shame can be broken down into specific behaviors and reflections which typically include spiritual remorse, spiritual introspection, and divine forgiveness (Exline & Rose, 2013). When transgressing behaviors and thoughts arise they contribute to feelings of alienation from the divine, spiritual unworthiness, and despair (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001). Communities that promote compassion, forgiveness, and pathways to redemption bolster divine forgiveness, facilitate coping, healing and reintegration. Conversely, communities that emphasize punishment and ostracism exacerbate feelings of shame, isolation and spiritual disengagement (Randall & Bishop, 2013).

Taqwa Divine Forgiveness and Spiritual Shame

Taqwa is Allah's infinite compassion and willingness to forgive when individuals sincerely repent and seek His forgiveness (Bonab et al., 2013). Taqwa is characterized by a heightened awareness of moral and ethical responsibilities towards God and fellow human beings. It encompasses a deep sense of piety, mindfulness, and devotion to Allah's commandments. Whenever Muslims with a high degree of taqwa or *mutaqqis* (متقين) if transgress usually suffer immediate spiritual shame seek divine forgiveness and rectify their shortcomings to rejuvenate and strengthen their bond (taqwa) with Allah. Spiritual shame reinforces commitment to Allah, and within the context of taqwa acts as a significant motivator for seeking divine forgiveness. It strengthens the positive association between taqwa and seeking forgiveness by intensifying one's commitment to God-consciousness, moral rectitude, and continual self-improvement. This association reflects the deep intertwining of spiritual shame

and the practice of taqwa in Islam, emphasizing the pursuit of closeness to God through acknowledgment of one's limitations and seeking His forgiveness.

Spiritual shame and divine forgiveness are deeply intertwined concepts in many religious traditions, particularly Abrahamic faiths, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. According to Islamic teachings, forgiveness and acceptance of the repentant sinner come from the belief of the believer in the all-forgiving Allah al-Rahman. A Muslim understands that they are forgiven by Allah through several spiritual indications and feelings. First, tawbah, or sincere repentance is followed by true remorse, which may lead to feelings of comfort in the heart of the believer that comes with the realization that God has accepted repentance. The Qur'an emphasizes that Allah forgives much to those who turn to Him, repentant and desirous of not sinning again (Al-Quran, 39:53). Also, repentance may be expressed by changes in believers' behavior and spiritual satisfaction, which would suggest that their repentance has been accepted. Of course, other external signs like life circumstances changing for the better may help the believer to be even more convinced of forgiveness however, the main guarantee lies in the faith in Allah and His promise of mercy to those who repent.

Christians believe that Jesus has taken care of all the sins of Christians, so they do not need to repent, but accept Jesus as their Savior. In some branches of Christianity (e.g., Catholicism), absolution from wrongdoing (sin) follows only after auricular confession, as forgiveness can be given only "through the priests" (Brom, 2004). Others may instead emphasize the example of Jesus, who forgave his enemies on the cross without the enemies having to repent or even ask for forgiveness. However, as Auerbach (2005, p. 479) notes, "While the Christian tradition depicts God as a model of absolute mercy and forgiveness, Judaism uses the same verses to teach its believers the limits of forgiveness (Fincham & May, 2023b).

Spiritual shame arises from the awareness and acknowledgment of having transgressed divine laws or moral standards. Divine forgiveness, on the other hand, is the merciful response of God felt by the repentant sinner. God absolves an individual from their sins and restores the relationship that was

damaged by the transgression (Exline & Rose, 2013). Divine forgiveness is often contingent on sincere spiritual shame, which is an acknowledgment of the wrongdoing, a genuine feeling of remorse (spiritual shame), and a commitment to change behavior.

The relationship between spiritual shame and divine forgiveness can be viewed as a redemptive cycle. Spiritual shame recognizes moral failings and the need for divine grace. It is a painful yet necessary step towards self-improvement and spiritual growth. It prompts introspection and an earnest seeking of divine forgiveness, which is seen as the only remedy for the spiritual ailment caused by sin (Granqvist & Hagekull, 2001). Divine forgiveness, in response to spiritual shame and spiritual shame, is transformative. It not only absolves the individual from the guilt and burden of their sins but also restores their relationship with the divine. It allows for spiritual renewal and provides the individual with a clean slate to start afresh in their spiritual journey (Randall & Bishop, 2013).

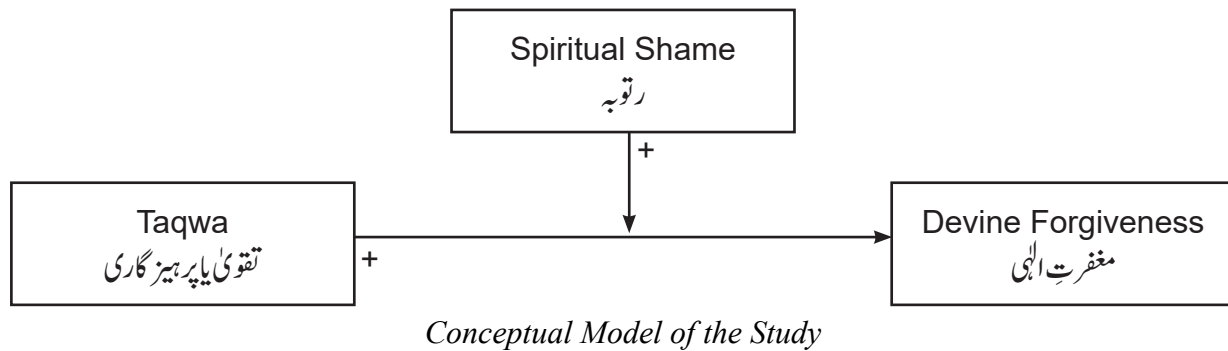
In many religions including Islam, the capacity of the Divine to forgive is limitless, symbolizing infinite mercy and compassion. This concept serves as a source of hope and comfort for believers, assuring them that no matter the depth of their transgressions, the opportunity for redemption and forgiveness is always available, so long as they return with a contrite heart (Pargament, 1997) so that they can heal, restore and overcome shortcomings, and realign themselves with their spiritual ideals.

When entrenched believers sin, they experience an intense sense of spiritual shame questioning the veracity of their relationship with Allah. They wonder about their hypocrisy and acknowledge straying away from the path of taqwa. While spiritual shame is distressing for them, it plays a crucial role in tawbah or spiritual shame. It acts as a catalyst for spiritual reflection and self-assessment, prompting believers to seek forgiveness and make amends. Spiritual shame for taqwa is not to paralyze the believer but to inspire them for ensuing transformations and return to piety and righteousness (Hawa, 2004). In essence, taqwa represents a state of continual mindfulness and obedience to Allah, facilitating spiritual growth and closer alignment with the Divine. In this sense, taqwa constitutes an important precursor of divine forgiveness. Believers

learn that tawbah and taqwa are the mechanisms that bring them back to the righteous path after going astray. Taqwa is the binding force between a believer and God and whenever this bond weakens, tawbah is the way to fortify it. The Qur'an refers to taqwa as a prerequisite for the forgiveness of sins or tawbah. Qur'an says, "Whoever fears Allah, He will expunge his evil deeds and will richly reward him (Al-Qur'an, 65:5)." The above discussion led us to propose spiritual shame would work as a positive

predictor of divine forgiveness which in turn should predict taqwa; spiritual shame should also predict taqwa directly. The relationships among these theistic constructs were envisioned in a moderation model (See Figure 1 below) and were tested in modern Pakistani Muslims that would replicate many historical experiences of Muslim believers where taqwa or God-consciousness resulted from spiritual shame.

Figure 1.



Note. Taqwa (independent variable) influences Divine Forgiveness (dependent variable) whereas Spiritual Shame (Moderating variable) strengthens the bond between the other two variables.

Method

Sample

We conveniently sampled Pakistani Muslims, 329 women and 206 men ($N = 535$) recruited from Sargodha, Rawalpindi, and Lahore who were 18 years or older (age range 19-75; $M = 30.68$, $SD = 11.92$), and had at least matriculated from school. Activity-wise the sample was divided into 200 university students, 100 businesspersons, 118 housewives, and 117 variously employed adults in public and private domains like banks, telecommunication, and schools and universities. The sample according to family structure had 290 participants from nuclear families and 210 from joint families. Three hundred and thirty-three participants were married and 202 were single.

Assessment measures

The study used standardized instruments developed in English, however, for participant ease of use, researchers translated (forward-backward) them in Urdu (Brislin, 1970). Therefore, the Divine

Forgiveness Scale (Fincham & May, 2022), the Offence-related Shame subscale taken from the Offense-related Shame and Guilt Scale (Wright & Gudjonsson, 2007), and the Taqwa Scale (Nazam et al., 2022) were translated in Urdu, by three qualified translators proficient in Urdu and English. The steps included: forward translations in Urdu, review by a panel of experts that voted for the best translation, backward translation in English by a senior faculty member of the English, University of Sargodha, feedback on forward-backward translations by a panel of experts comprising of authors and two senior faculty members from psychology, University of Sargodha. All involved in these forward and backward translations collaborated to sift inconsistencies out and include cultural meaningfulness in the final translations of the instruments. To test the clarity and meaningfulness of the translated scales 30 participants completed these scales and expressed no difficulties in comprehension or cultural understanding giving us the confidence that they could be used for Urdu-speaking populations.

Taqwa Scale (TS). Developed by Nazam et al. (2022) TS is a self-report Urdu measure that consists of 12 items. Participants responded to each item on a 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Strongly Disagree* to 5 *Strongly Agree*. No items were reverse-scored. The internal consistency of the TS was high (Cronbach $\alpha = .94$) in a sample of 229 Indian Muslim university students (Nazam et al., 2022). An item on the scale reads as:

”میرا یقین ہے کہ اللہ سے محبت کرنے والے
شخص کو کوئی خوف یا تشویش نہیں ہوتی۔“

Divine Forgiveness Scale (DFS). Developed by Fincham and May (2022), DFS is a 5-item self-report measure. Participants responded to each item on a 6-point Likert-type scale that ranged from 1 *Never* to 6 *Always*. No items were reverse-scored. The internal consistency of DFS ranged from good to excellent (Cronbach alphas = .88 to .96) across two samples of college students (Fincham & May, 2021). An item on the scale reads as:

ہوں تو وہ مجھے معاف کر دیتے ہیں۔ ”مجھے یقین ہے
کہ جب بھی میں اللہ تعالیٰ سے معافی مانگتا“

Offense-related Shame Subscale (OSS). Repentance or spiritual shame was measured by a 5-item offense-related shame subscale (translated in Urdu) taken from the Offense-related Shame and Guilt Scale (Wright & Gudjonsson, 2007). Participants responded to each item on a 7-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 *Almost Always Not True of Me* to 5 *Almost Always True of Me*. No items were reverse-scored. The internal consistency of the OSS subscale is adequate (Cronbach $\alpha = .81$)

reported by the authors (Wright & Gudjonsson, 2007). An item on the scale reads as:

”جو کچھ میں نے کیا اس کے بعد میں خود کو
دوسروں کی نسبت کم وقعت سمجھتا ہوں۔“

Procedure

Participants were approached in person at their workplaces or residences and were told about the nature and objectives of the study. After signing the consent forms, they completed a demographic sheet followed by the three instruments (see above). Participants were assured their responses would remain confidential and anonymous and used only for study purposes. They were also told that their participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any stage of their session or later. On average, participants spent about 20 minutes to complete the instruments. No compensation was offered for their participation. We approached and distributed 600 packets of instruments plus the demographic sheet, however, only 535 packets were usable, and 65 were excluded either because we did not receive them back, or they were partially completed or had response-set issues. At the end of each session, researchers expressed gratitude and thanks to the participants for their valuable contributions to the study.

Descriptive statistics, internal consistency, and regression were analyzed through SPSS (v. 26, IBM Corp.) to discern the relationships among the constructs. And PROCESS macro (Model 1) for SPSS (Hayes, 2018) was employed to analyze the moderating role of repentance between taqwa and divine forgiveness.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha coefficients of reliability for various measures used in the current study. All measures were internally consistent ($\alpha > .70$). The Cronbach's alpha coefficients of the scales closely correspond to the reliability coefficients reported by their original authors. Skewness and kurtosis values fell within normal ranges indicating that our variables were normally distributed, therefore, the data were appropriate for the parametric tests. The actual range corresponds well to the potential range suggesting no issues of restricted range.

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Internal Consistencies of the Scales

Scale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range		<i>Sk</i> ^a	<i>Ku</i> ^b	<i>A</i>	TS	OSS	DFS
			Actual	Potential						
TS	64.46	7.05	26-72	12-72	-1.39	3.27	.92	-	.19 ¹	.47 ²
OSS	21.17	8.14	5-35	5-35	-.20	-.91	.79		-	.31 ²
DFS	26.74	3.96	10-30	5-30	-1.74	3.06	.84			-

Note. TS = Taqwa Scale, OSS = Offense-related Shame Subscale, DFS = Divine Forgiveness Scale, ^aStandard error of skewness = .14, ^bStandard error of kurtosis = .28

¹ $p < .01$, ² $p < .001$

Table 2 presents the summary of the findings of the moderation analysis. Taqwa and spiritual shame both have significant positive effects on seeking divine forgiveness. The interaction effect of taqwa and spiritual shame is also positive and significant suggesting that spiritual shame moderated between taqwa and seeking divine forgiveness. The conditional effects of taqwa on seeking divine forgiveness at various levels of spiritual shame suggest that spiritual shame strengthened the positive association between taqwa and seeking divine forgiveness.

Table 2

Main and Interaction Effects of Taqwa and Spiritual Shame on Divine Forgiveness

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	95% CI		<i>R</i> ²
			LL	UL	
Taqwa	.27 ²	.03	.21	.30	.29 ²
Spiritual Shame	.15 ¹	.02	.07	.18	
Taqwa X Spiritual Shame	.11 ¹	.001	.06	.14	
Conditional Effects					
Low Spiritual Shame (M-1SD)	.20 ²	.03	.13	.26	
Medium Spiritual Shame (M)	.27 ²	.02	.21	.30	
High Spiritual Shame (M+1SD)	.34 ²	.03	.26	.8	

Note. *M* = Mean, *SD* = Standard Deviation

¹ $p < .01$, ² $p < .001$

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the influence of taqwa on divine forgiveness in the Islamic tradition. The findings supported our first hypothesis, demonstrating a positive and statistically significant relationship between taqwa and divine forgiveness. Individuals who reported higher taqwa were more likely to experience a greater sense of divine forgiveness, indicating that their spiritual consciousness positively predicted their perception of Allah's mercy and willingness to forgive. Taqwa holds a central and revered place within Islam. It is often described as the foundation of one's relationship with God and is closely linked to one's consciousness of God's presence in daily life (Esposito, 2011). Believers are encouraged to cultivate taqwa as a means to navigate life's challenges while remaining steadfast in their faith. Islamic teachings emphasize the importance of taqwa in fostering divine forgiveness. Believers are taught that those who are conscious of God and strive to uphold His commandments are more likely to be recipients of His mercy and forgiveness. Taqwa is seen as the guiding force that encourages spiritual shame, seeking forgiveness, and striving to live in accordance with God's will. Individuals who possess a strong sense of taqwa are more inclined to act in ways that align with their religious values and principles. This includes acknowledging their faults, seeking forgiveness for their sins, and sincerely repenting for their wrongdoings. Taqwa serves as a motivator for individuals to maintain a close connection with God, recognizing His attributes of forgiveness and compassion (McCullough et al., 2003).

Our second hypothesis that posited, spiritual shame, stemming from a genuine acknowledgment of wrongdoing and moral transgressions, would serve as a positive predictor of divine forgiveness and our findings offer support for this hypothesis. When individuals experience spiritual shame, arising from a recognition of transgressions against these principles, the innate desire for reconciliation with a higher power comes into play. Seeking divine forgiveness becomes a natural response, aligned with religious teachings that emphasize the importance of atonement for sins. This process is not only seen as a means of rectifying one's actions but

also as a cathartic journey involving self-reflection and a commitment to improvement. The hope for redemption and a renewed spiritual connection further motivates individuals to engage in the ritual of seeking divine forgiveness, fostering a sense of communal harmony and adherence to shared values within religious communities.

Seeking divine forgiveness is often linked to the restoration of spiritual connection. Hall and Fincham (2008) highlight an act like this can lead to increased feelings of reconciliation and restored spiritual harmony, enabling individuals to reestablish a sense of connection with their faith or higher power. This restoration of connection can alleviate the burden of spiritual shame, fostering a sense of self-forgiveness and reducing negative emotions (Tangney et al., 2007). Exline and Baumeister (2000) emphasize that seeking forgiveness, whether divine or interpersonal, can significantly reduce psychological distress associated with feelings of shame. In a similar vein, Kang and Shaver (2004) showed that the resolution of spiritual shame through seeking divine forgiveness would foster healthier emotional regulation and coping strategies.

Implications

This knowledge not only offers potential avenues for enhancing spiritual development in community programs but also emphasizes the need for support systems that can guide Muslims in their spiritual journey reuniting with Allah after repenting their wrongdoings. Moreover, these findings could pave the way for future research in other religious and educational contexts when establishing curriculum for Muslim children and adults, emphasizing the delicate balance between God-consciousness, spiritual shame, and the quest for divine forgiveness.

Limitations and Suggestions

Like other empirical research, this study also has its limitations. First, self-reported data from participants is always subject to biases, such as the social desirability bias, which could have exaggerated the magnitude of the relationships among the constructs of the study, however, authors believe that the direction of relationship among these constructs is accurately reflects

what has been suggested in literature or spiritual anecdotes in Islam. Second, the interpretations of taqwa, spiritual shame, and divine forgiveness across various cultural or regional backgrounds in the three cities where data was collected may not completely align and variability in responses of the participants could have affected the strength of magnitudes measured in our data. Third, *taqwa* and *divine forgiveness* are abstract and religious constructs and present challenges when quantified with quantitative measures. Fourth, despite a sizable sample, the average age of the sample was around 30 years with fewer older participants, which certainly does not represent adult Muslim population; not having enough older Muslims would certainly affect results, making the study less generalizable. Finally, a correlational analysis does not discern causality among the constructs, where taqwa works to influence divine forgiveness, or it could be that believer's realization of divine forgiveness could influence their taqwa, and spiritual shame could influence taqwa or divine forgiveness separately or together.

To understand these constructs better and the way younger and older Muslim view them future research may consider mixed methods where quantitative and qualitative data could be collected in the same individuals, this could enrich our understanding of how Muslims comprehend these constructs and when they complete psychometric measures how do their in-depth understanding of these constructs aligns with quantitative data. Moreover, a longitudinal design may be employed to better understand changes or development of these constructs in Muslims; a study like this could narrow down causal factors amongst these variables. Multiple samples or a large diverse sample that covers a wide stretch of Muslim community should be used this would make generalizations better. Finally, future studies should investigate the role of divine forgiveness in improving the mental health in Muslims. The need for studying the role of divine forgiveness in mental health is evident globally in all religious traditions. Divine forgiveness in all traditions provide a structured framework for self-reflection, allowing individuals to acknowledge their shortcomings, mistakes and sins, where road to divine forgiveness could be taken to correct them.

This process is psychologically beneficial, seeking forgiveness from God and making amends, serves a form of emotional cleansing (Koenig, 2012).

Conclusion

This research highlights the pivotal role of taqwa in shaping perception of Allah as merciful and willing to forgive. As a fundamental concept in Islam, taqwa encourages believers to lead their lives characterized by piety, self-awareness, and devotion to Allah and His commandments, ultimately facilitating a deeper connection with the Divine and a greater experience of divine forgiveness, which includes a sense of knowing that they have been forgiven. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the spiritual dimensions of Islam and the dynamics of faith within the Pakistani Muslim community. Spiritual shame serves as a catalyst for individuals to engage in acts of spiritual shame and reconciliation with the Divine, ultimately reinforcing their belief in the possibility of divine forgiveness. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between human psychology and religious faith, shedding light on the dynamics of shame and forgiveness within a spiritual context.

This research underscores the interplay between religious beliefs, emotions, and spiritual growth. It also emphasizes the transformative power of spiritual shame when experienced as heightening taqwa, promoting a deeper connection with God and a genuine pursuit of divine forgiveness. These findings contribute to a richer understanding of the spiritual dimensions of human psychology and the dynamics of faith in Islam noted in Pakistani Muslims in our study.

Declarations:

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Conflict of Interest. The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Availability of Data. The data in .sav form will be made available on reasonable request.

Ethical Approval. This research has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee of Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha via letter no. UoS/Psy-352 dated 23/01/2023.

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