

## Religious Identity Formation and Development in Adolescents of Pakistan

Saba Ghayas<sup>1</sup>, Syeda Shahida Batool<sup>2</sup>

1. Department of Psychology, Government College University Lahore

2. Department of Psychology, University of Sargodha

For Correspondence: Syeda Shahida Batool. Shahidaphd@yahoo.com

### Abstract

**Objective and Method.** To explore the formation and development of religious identity in Pakistani adolescents, a qualitative approach was used to analyze the data, collected from nine adolescent boys and nine adolescent girls of age ranged between 15-17 years ( $M = 15.8$ ,  $SD = .81$ ). These adolescents were students of grade 9-10, and were sampled from different cities of Pakistan. Data were collected via a semi-structured interview schedule, adapted from the ego identity interview guideline by Marcia (1966).

**Analyses.** Thematic analysis was applied to generate and cluster themes appeared in the transcribed interviews of 18 participants.

**Results.** The results revealed that religious identity was formed on three rudiments: belief, behavior, and belongingness. All the participants appeared to be at the foreclosure state of religious identity, and the religious identity appeared to be developed through seven channels: parental influence, the role of grandparents, peer influence, religious preachers, media, teachers' power, and personal preferences.

**Conclusion.** This paper provides theoretical and practical implications for the religious identity development of adolescents in Pakistan.

**Keywords.** *Adolescents, religious identity, identity formation, thematic analysis, semi-structured interview*



## Introduction

Identity development is one of the main issues in adolescence. Erikson (1958, 1963) explains that human identity is socially founded during a period between 12-18 years. During this period, identity development is a core task where adolescents are in the phase of transition to adulthood by exploration and commitments; and if the transition leads to success, identity integrates however if the transition is riddled with confusion, identity crisis ensues (Erickson, 1963; Marcia, 1993). Exploration involves searching for sensible social options and alternatives before making commitments which Marcia (1966) operationalized as four identity statuses; diffusion (no commitments, no explorations) moratorium (no commitments, but exploration) foreclosure (commitment without exploration), and identity achievement (after exploration, commitments are made). To explore these statuses, Marcia (1993) developed Ego Identity Interview to study these statuses in different domains including, occupation, politics, religion, sexual values, etc. Adams and colleagues extended this work by developing and refining a test called Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status (EOM-EIS II) to study identity status in four ideological (occupation, religion, politics, philosophy of life) and four interpersonal (friendships, dating, gender roles, recreation/leisure) domains and global rating (Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989; Adams & Ethier, 1999). To study identity status in different domains, interviews and tests as above have been used in a variety of qualitative and quantitative studies (Copen & Silverstein, 2008; Dinter, 2006; Fisherman, 2011; Hawkins, 2005; Nelson, 2010; Wang, 2012).

Identity is a term that entails multiple meanings regarding the context — gender identity, religious identity, national identity, professional identity, etc.). Researchers have already explored different contexts of identity development among adolescents (Batool & Ghayas, 2020; Jugert et al., 2020; Sugimura, 2020). It is said that religion plays a significant role in the identity development of adolescents. Keeping in view the importance of religion, researchers explored particularly the development of religious identity (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010; Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015; King & Boyatzis, 2004).

Religious identity means how a person assigns meaning to his religious group membership and the significance assigned to the particular religion that consequently influences the self-concept of individuals (Arweck & Nesbitt, 2010). Religious identity is shaped by the psychological, social, political, and devotional facets of religious belonging (Deaux, 2001), which is influenced by factors like gender, ethnicity, and generational status (King & Boyatzis, 2004; Lee, 2002), and when adolescents are surrounded by peers, religious identity formation is fostered however, when adolescents are without this support, religious identity formation is hindered or weakened (Wang, 2012). Chaudhury and Miller (2008) reported that Bangladeshi-American adolescent Muslims felt it crucial for them to develop their religious identity with peers who made them comfortable in expressing and developing their faith. School and social relationships (which includes parents) in which adolescents can question religion and cast their doubts are important for religious identity (Exline, 2004). Many studies have been carried out to study the religious identity of adolescents coming from various religious beliefs (Bertram-Troost et al., 2009; Gibbs, & Goldbach, 2020; Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015; Malayev et al., 2014; Rich & Iluz, 2003; Spiegler et al., 2019) and some researchers have also explored the religious identity of Pakistani adolescents living in Norway (Osterberg, 2003) and Italy (Giuliani & Tagliabue, 2015). However, there is a dearth of studies on the religious identity of adolescents, living in Pakistan. To fill this gap, we carried out a qualitative study to investigate the religious identity of adolescents in Pakistan. The underlying logic was to ascertain the nature of religious identity through an in-depth analysis. Two particular research questions were addressed:

1. What are the components of religious identity formation?
2. Which factors influence the development of religious identity in adolescents of Pakistan?

## Method

### Sample

A purposive sample from Lahore, Peshawar, Gilgit Baltistan, Quetta, Karachi, and Islamabad was taken, and we made sure that participants came both from cities and rural areas to represent Pakistan at the provincial level. The sample comprised of nine adolescent boys and nine adolescent girls, and their age ranged between 15 and 17 years ( $M = 15.8$ ,  $SD = .81$ ) and belonged to 9-10<sup>th</sup> grades. The participants that came from intact families were included and possible participants living with single parents (divorced, separated, and widowed) and parents away for jobs were excluded to ensure the homogeneity of the sample. Muslim students were included and students of other religions and faiths were not, and the reason for doing so was to keep the theme of religion consistent in all participants, as the addition of other religions in a small sample of 18 would have diluted the effects of Islam on religious identity. No participant had any history of psychiatric disorder, in addition, participants with disabilities were not included in the sample.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Sample*

<b>Sr. No</b>	<b>Pseudonyms</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Class/Grade</b>	<b>Age</b>
1.	Hashir	Boy	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
2.	Sara	Girl	10 <sup>th</sup>	16
3.	Salaar	Boy	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
4.	Zain	Boy	10 <sup>th</sup>	17
5.	Sana	Girl	10 <sup>th</sup>	16
6.	Iqra	Girl	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
7.	Nimra	Girl	10 <sup>th</sup>	17
8.	Ahad	Boy	10 <sup>th</sup>	16
9.	Amna	Girl	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
10.	Waqar	Girl	10 <sup>th</sup>	16
11.	Mavra	Girl	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
12.	Sahil	Boy	10 <sup>th</sup>	17
13.	Zartasha	Girl	10 <sup>th</sup>	17
14.	Ali	Boy	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
15.	Adila	Girl	10 <sup>th</sup>	15
16.	Kamal	Boy	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
17.	Haya	Girl	9 <sup>th</sup>	15
18.	Ahmad	Boy	10 <sup>th</sup>	15

## Instrument

A semi-structured interview adapted from Ego Identity Interview (Marcia, 1966) after the author's permission was prepared for the study and was revised based on existing literature, general observations, theories of identity formation, and expert opinions of professionals in the field. The interview questions were based on the process and factors associated with the religious identity of participants. Twenty open-ended questions were prepared and were finalized after the prompts, probes, and opinions of the experts.

## Procedure

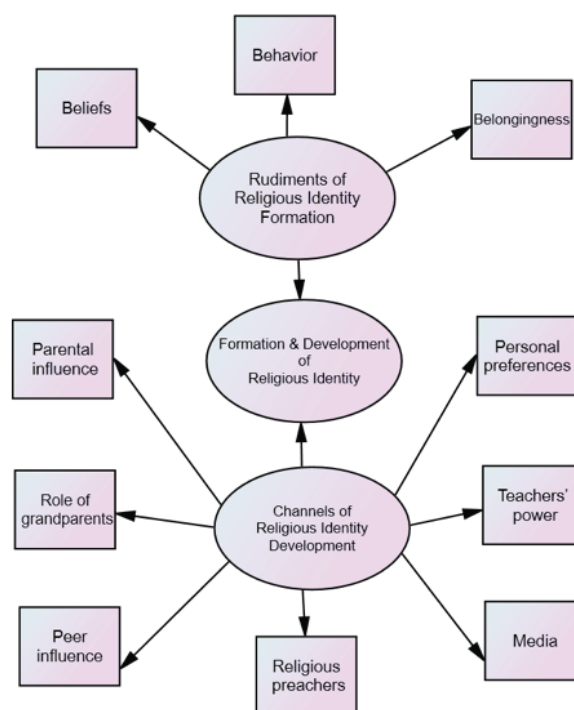
The study was approved by the Punjab Higher Education Commission of Pakistan. Parental and institutional permission was sought before the commencement of the study and copies of the interview protocol were provided to the parents for review. The participants were approached at schools or places that suited them for the interview. They were briefed about the purpose of the study and were ensured that their personal information would remain anonymous and confidential. Any information that would be published would use aliases only. The interviews were recorded (and later transcribed) in a congenial atmosphere with probing queries to gain in-depth information when required. No participant expressed hesitation and properly answered interview questions in an elaborative and to the investigator's satisfaction. The average time for each interview was 30 minutes long on average. Participants were asked to share their experience at the end of the interview and were thanked for their participation in the study.

## Analysis

In order to analyze the data obtained through semi structured interviews, thematic analysis was applied. It helped in a flexible manner of identifying, analyzing, and reporting the pattern within the obtained data. Guidelines provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) were used to manually analyze the data. Use of software provides somewhat narrower perspective therefore manual analysis was carried out as it is considered relatively more accurate (Medelyan, 2020). Initially familiarizing with the data was the main focus of analysis. Data were reduced and initial codes were generated. After the development of themes, they were refined and their boundaries were clearly defined.

## Results and Interpretation

**Figure 1.** Formation and Development of Religious Identity in Adolescents



Analysis of data revealed that the religious identity of adolescents is basically comprised of belief, behavior, and belongingness. Adolescents have opportunities to explore religious traditions and beliefs. However, the freedom and flexibility of their exploration are typically determined by multiple factors. Narrations of participants reflect that various factors influence all the components of religious identity. Researchers have reasoned that due to adolescents' relatively stable social environment, there is not a strong need to further explore and renegotiate their religious identity. Moreover, religious identity is mainly driven by parents during adolescence (Lopez et al., 2011). Given that adolescents tend to live with their parents during high school, they may not feel engaged in a deeper exploration of their religion, which helps to explain the observed stable religious identity. At the same time adolescents may exercise their increased autonomy and show up their interest to different religious modes of teaching.

## Rudiments of Religious Identity Formation Belief

Narrations of participants reflect that participants have developed religious beliefs. None of the participants reflected any doubts about the basic religious belief of Muslims. The belief system is inherited and after birth, children start internalizing the belief system of their parents. It is reflected by the interviews of almost all participants.

*I am Muslim because my parents are Muslim. Religion is destined (Hashir).*

The most important reason for commitment to religious identity among participants is the belief that it is the religion of their parents. The transmission of religious beliefs and values across generations is one of the primary sources by which continuity of religion is maintained in the generations. The narration of participants reflects that religion is not questionable rather it is destined and it is not up to the choice of individuals as it is pre decided:

*A lot of questions regarding religion arise in my mind but I satisfy myself and make me understand that if it is written in Quran and Ahadis then it means it is correct and I should not be doubtful about it... Maybe I will understand logics once I will grow up (Hashir).*

*It's difficult to understand the concept of life after death but as it the basic part of our belief system, so I think life after death cannot be questioned (Iqra).*

As the participants believed that it was not allowed to raise a question against the religious ideology so there is the lowest level of exploration in religious identity and all children are at the status of the foreclosure because they seem to identify themselves with the religion not because of their exploration rather because of the fact that their parents have inculcated in them the religion they are practicing. Participants talked about belief in the Afterlife, belief in the oneness of God, belief in Prophets, and angels and they also talked about belief in the Holy Quran.

As the attitude of majority of participant towards different sects concern, they believe:

*I can't pass any comment about the sect system as I do not have sufficient information about similarities and differences among sects (Amna).*

*I am against this sect system. I feel that all sects are basically trying to prove themselves better than others and all other motives are unreal (Ahsan).*

*I am against this sect system. We Muslims should remain only Muslim. (Ali)*

*I am against sectarianism. We are all Muslims and we should not fight on trivial matters (Adila).*

Narrations of participants reflect that they are very well aware of the fact that their knowledge is not sufficient, therefore they cannot say anything about sectarianism. It can be said that the reason behind this negative attitude towards sectarianism is either acceptance for others' beliefs or their cognizance that they do not have sufficient knowledge regarding different sects. It shows their lack exploration of religious knowledge at this stage of life.

Furthermore, narration of the participants reflects that beliefs are operational, therefore these beliefs influence their other identities and influence their decision making about career, marriage, social identity, etc.

*In case I am asking Allah Tala for something but I am not getting for which I am praying, I understand that it is surely for my betterment as He is the best planner (Sara).*

*In eighth class, I put my efforts to get good grades but my result was not up to the mark. I was very sad but mama made me understand that it was Allah's will and everything happens for the good reason, so we should not be sad about it (Hashir).*

*Allah Tala listens to our prayers and surely answers to our prayers. If the response is delayed then it means it is certainly for our betterment (Sana).*

The narration of the participants reflects that Tawakul (perfect trust and reliance in Allah) is an important component of adolescents' belief systems. It is interesting that the element of Tawakul is marked with maturity and firm belief and it is expected to be practiced by mature people. But in the current study, most of the participants reported Tawakul as a healthy coping mechanism.



The element of Tawakul is basically inculcated by their parents because it is the healthiest way to console the individual for any loss or for unfulfillment of any desire. In the case of the current sample, participants experienced low grades despite their hard work and it increased their religiosity and intensity of prayers. In this scenario, parents console their children on the basis of the will of Allah and Tawakul. It appeared to be a coping mechanism that can relieve the pain of individuals. As the sample of current study comprised of only Muslim participants, so the element of Tawakul is conceived as a part of Islamic belief system: the peak of belief in Allah. In case adolescents are not able to completely internalize the concept of Tawakul, they do understand this concept.

Belief is an integral part of any religion and it is further connected with religious behavior or religious practice.

### **Behavior**

Behavior appeared as an important component of religious identity. It is revealed that behavior can be the result of belief, training given by parents and it might be the result of observational learning. Narrations of participants reflect that the behavior of participants is dependent upon the reason behind the belief system. Strong belief makes participants to fulfill their religious obligations and to avoid the things which are even appealing for them but are prohibited in Islam, for instance:

*Religious practice is very important because if religious practice is appropriate then there will be relief in the afterlife (Ahad).*

*I try my level best to pass my life according to the teachings of Islam and I think every Muslim should do this (Ahsan).*

*I regularly offer prayers but sometimes it is three times and sometimes it is four times (Hashir).*

*I never skip fasting in Ramazan, and offer three to four prayers in the whole day (Sara).*

*I use to attend the religious gatherings, for instance, Milad (Iqra).*

*I recite Holy Quran daily. We should recite Quran daily as it is sent for our guidance and for our welfare (Ali).*

The narrations of participants reflect that though their religious beliefs were not the result of their own personal exploration, nevertheless adolescents have substantial understanding of their religious beliefs and were aware of the significance of religious practices. The firmness of belief system seems to lead adolescents towards religious practice. Almost all participants reported their understanding of the importance of Prayer, fasting, and recitation of the Quran. Most of the participants admit that they are not completely regular in religious practice but none of the participants denied the importance of religion-oriented behaviors.

*I try to avoid all those things which are prohibited in Islam (Ahad).*

*I feel attracted to the food and drinks of non-Muslims but can't go for it as it is prohibited in Islam... I like the western style dresses and dresses of Indian actresses but can't wear that type of dress due to my religious teachings (Amna).*

*I really wish to answer the stupidity of other girls in the same coin but then I ignore them just because of religious teachings. Even sometimes I feel like using abusive languages but I do not verbalize such words as it is prohibited in Islam (Ahsan).*

*I like short hairs of models and their styles but I do control myself as I know that Islam does not like it so I should not do the things which are not permitted in Islam (Adila).*

Accounts of participants reflect that the belief system of the participants not only helps them in adopting religion-oriented behavior but it also leads them towards avoidance of religiously prohibited acts. Narrations of participants reflect that they feel attraction towards western life style- foods, music, dresses, etc. It is natural for adolescents as their age is marked with sensation seeking, glamour and risk-taking behavior. Despite these natural attractions, they consider religion as the “parameter” of life, therefore, they control their desires, wishes, and their aspirations.

Narrations of participants reflect that at this stage of life, their religious behavior is based more upon the extrinsic type of religious orientation.

*My prayers increase in exam days (Ahad).  
Whenever I need something, I start praying  
(Amna).*

*I offer prayer regularly and keep fasting in  
Ramzan. These religious practices are beneficial  
to me...I achieve good scores in exams. (Mavra).*

*I use to offer prayers more regularly before the  
commencement of results of exams and this  
regularity gradually declines after results (Iqra).*

*Religious practice is very important because if  
religious practice is appropriate, there will be  
relief in the afterlife (Ahad).*

Narrations of participants portray that they practice religious ritual to gain material gains. As participants are not mature enough, therefore, religion does not seem to be completely internalized. They are generally following religious practices to achieve targets and material gains. The most important likely benefit which triggers participants for regularity in prayer and other religion-oriented activities is good scores in the exam. The most important concern of this age group is their performance in exams and good grades, therefore they reported having a significant change in their religious behavior during exams and before the commencements of results. Participants also reported that they performed religious duties for reward in the afterlife. The accounts of participants portray that at this age, individuals keep in view particular benefits, rewards, or outcomes of religious behaviors.

### **Belongingness**

Thematic analysis revealed that some of the participants developed belongingness with religion. Belongingness did not appear in all the participants, it was seen only in the participants who appeared to have stronger religious beliefs and practices. Belongingness reflects the level of bonding with one's religion which results in emotional attachment.

*The most important thing is my religion. I think,  
nothing is more important than my religion  
(Ahsan).*

*I feel emotionally aroused when anyone talks  
about the khatam e nabuwat (Muhammad the last  
prophet) (Ali).*

*I like to participate in religion-related  
discussions. I become emotional when someone  
says negative about our religious beliefs and  
practices. Last week one of the class fellow was  
showing sympathy for outcast people and it made  
me emotional and I argued with her (Nimra).*

*I have a warm and deep attachment with Allah  
and I can feel his presence all the time (Ahsan).*

*I believe that Allah Tala listens to me especially,  
when I pray from the core of my heart (Mavra).*

*I feel a very strong relationship with Allah (Ali).*

Belongingness is a deep subjective experience of participants. Religious identity is unique in the sense that it is developed as a result of foreclosure without proper self-exploration- but still it is marked with deep roots and acceptance in individuals. Without complete acceptance, belongingness cannot be developed. The account of participants and body language shows that they have internalized religious belief, therefore, they are able to subjectively experience the presence of Allah and they are having a sense of being listened to and answered by God. It is interesting that adolescents experience such beautiful emotions and they are too attached with religious identity that they cannot bear anything against their religious belief system.

*I feel blessed to be Muslim. I sometimes  
think that it is Allah's blessing on me that I am  
born in a Muslim family. I love my religion as it is  
the most beautiful religion in the world... I feel  
pity for the Muslims of Syria. They are our  
brothers and they are bearing cruelties because of  
being Muslims... I feel sympathy for Non-Muslims  
as they are unfortunate people and they will be  
punished in the life hereafter (Ahad).*

The narration of the participant reflects that his level of belongingness with religious identity is so strong that he is expressing his sense of gratitude for being Muslim. He believes his faith is genuine, and others are mistaken or even unfortunate. His ideas are marked with particularism. Religious Particularism makes an individual proud of his own religion and s/he feels an association with the people of his own religion while all other religions are considered illegitimate.

## Channels of Religious Identity Development

Narrations of participants depict that the religious identity of adolescents is determined by various factors. Furthermore, thematic analysis reflects that these factors influence all the components of religious identity at a certain level. The nature of identity is determined by these factors.

### Parental Influence

Parents appear to play the most significant role in the religious development of children and adolescents. Individuals tend to adopt the religion that is taught and practiced during their upbringing. Parents manifest their religious beliefs and values through daily interactions with others and with their children.

*My parents taught me that religion is the basic code of life (Ahad).*

*Mama is very strict about the regularity of namaz and she herself is regular in religious practices (Amna).*

*My parents offer namaz very regularly and they themselves follow religious teachings very regularly... Therefore I am also trying to be like them (Ahad).*

*My parents are religiously very strong. They regularly offer prayers and their life is based upon religious teachings. They advise us to follow religion (Adila).*

*A few years back I use to idealize models and their western dresses. Then my father made me understand that though it attracts us, our religion does not allow us to wear such type of dresses...now I don't aspire to wear such dresses as I do understand that it is prohibited in Islam (Sara).*

The narrations of participants reflect that the religiosity of parents directly influences the development of religious identity of their children. Adolescents reported that from childhood, parents start inculcating their religious ideology in the mind of their children through informal education and through their own religious practices. The account of participants reflects that the religious practice of parents influences more on their children as compared to any other mode of education.

The narration of participants reflects that adolescents attribute their religious practice to the practice of their parents. They are providing logics that they are regular in prayers, recitation of the Quran, and Fasting because of their parents' regularity. Narrations of participants support the social learning theory which states that human beings learn religious behavior primarily through modeling: children observe and imitate the behavior of others for instance parents (Bandura & Walters, 1977). Therefore, parents who practice religion more often or who emphasize religion in the home promote the religious identity of adolescents.

*My father sometimes offers prayer in Mosque otherwise he usually offers prayers at home. But when he thinks that he should go to the mosque then he compels me to accompany him (Salaar).*

In adolescents, parents in Pakistan usually have control over the life of their children. The narration of participant given above reflects that his father tries include his son in religious practices by taking him to mosque. The narration of the participant further reflects that the religious practice of adolescents is dependent upon the consistency of parents in their religious practice. If parents are not consistent and regular in their religious practices, their intermittent religious practice cannot strongly inculcate significance of religious practice in adolescents.

*Sometimes mama asks me to do something as it is approved in Islam and papa opposes mama. For example, mama says wear Doppata and papa says don't wear Doppata as it is spoiling your modish look. We mostly listen to what papa says as we want to be looked stylish (Amna).*

*I use to skip fast in Ramazan because I cannot control my hunger. Papa does not like it but my mother says that if you cannot control your hunger then it is ok. Don't keep fast..My father says that I should offer prayers regularly and sometimes I get irritated and say to him that why he is saying this to me if my mother is not offering prayers. Firstly he should ask mama to offer the prayer then guide me (Salaar).*



The account of participants reflects that difference in the approach of parents towards practicing religious teachings, interrupts the religious identity of adolescents. Adolescents are not mature enough, therefore, they opt those things which are attractive and which demands lesser efforts. Fasting demands a high level of control and when the mother takes the side of the participant then it becomes easier for him to skip it and he ignores the instructions of his father. Similarly, the account of female above reflects that her mother tries to inculcate her own religious values but father appeared to have a different point of view. As a result of conflict in parents, the participant tends to listen to her own voice. Previously it was reported that having religiously heterogamous parents or parents with dissimilar patterns or levels of religious behavior is associated with lower overall religiosity in respondents (Mcphail, 2019).

### **Grandparents' influence**

Analysis of data revealed that other than parents, grandparents also play a very important role in the religious identity development of adolescents. Old age is mainly marked with a high level of religiosity and in the context of Pakistani culture, grandparents usually have very strong bonding with their grandchildren. They use to teach them what they have learnt in their whole lives.

*In the absence of Mama, when I stay with my grandparents, I offer prayers regularly and recite the Quran as well... I use to ask a lot of questions from my grandpa and he wholeheartedly answers me... but my parents do not answer my questions appropriately... and they ask me to keep my mouth shut (Salaar).*

*I like to spend time with my grandfather. He used to tell a lot of stories about historical events. I usually ask a lot of questions related to religion from grandfather (Hashir).*

*My grandfather uses to resolve my confusions related to religion (Sahil).*

*My grandmother made me learn the proper way of offering prayer (Zartasha).*

The narration of the participant reflects that participants are having a strong bonding with their grandparents. Participants perceive them as an authentic source of information, therefore, they use to ask their questions from them. Secondly, due to busy life routine, parents cannot provide sufficient time and attention to their children. Grandparents because of being retired or free from domestic and job-related responsibilities have plenty of time to spend with their grandchildren.

### **Peer Influence**

Peer group influence the life of adolescents. During adolescence, individuals make the transition from spending time with their family to spending more time with their friends or peers. It seems that peer influence on the religious ideas of individuals is more complex than the influence of parents.

*In case of any question related to religion, I ask questions from my friends (Amna).*

*My friends are religious and they help me in understanding various concepts that are difficult for me to understand (Adila).*

*My friends are like me and they use to share different religion grounded stories with me (Mavra).*

*I was worried about my 8th class result and my friends told me different types of WAZAIF (religious orations), for good results (Sana).*

The narration of participants reflects that participants consider their friends as authentic sources of information. Interestingly they ask questions and rely upon the given information of their peers.

*My friends and I, mostly go to the mosque together and if I don't offer Namaz in mosque any day then my friends come to my home and take me to the mosque. (Ali)*

The narration reflects that peer groups or friends are so much influential at this stage that they can steer the behavior of their friends in different directions. In the case of Ali, his friends were playing a significant possible role in religious identity development. At this stage of life, adolescents use to pass plenty of time with their peers and if they are having similar interests and behaviors grounded in religion then it automatically reinforces the religious identity of adolescents.

## Religious Preachers

Religious preachers play an important role in the religious identity development of adolescents

*Religious preachers also helped me in my concept clarity about religious matters (Ahsan).*

*I use to sit in the company of religious preachers and I like their company and their discussions... I have been taking interest in religious matters since my childhood and it was strange for people that a kid sits in the company of religious preachers (Ali).*

*I use to sit in the company of religious preachers and I like their company and their discussions. It increases my belongingness with the religion (Ali).*

*I daily go to Madrisa and sit in the company of my madrasa teachers and they preach us about our religious obligations and their company keeps me on the right track (Adila).*

Thematic analysis revealed that adolescents perceive religious preacher as an authentic source of information. The narration of participants reflects that the company of religious preachers influences the belief, behavior, and belongingness of participants. The influence of religious preachers indicates the level of trust adolescents have on them. They rely upon their given information, therefore, they spend their time in their company.

## Teachers' Power

Teachers appeared as another significant factor influencing the religious identity of adolescents. Characteristics of teachers are of primary importance in shaping the religious identity of their students.

*From the very start, teachers taught us about importance of religion and religious obligations and a lot of religious concepts are deep-rooted in me because of teachers (Iqra).*

*My teacher is very competent and she relates different concepts with religion and it help us understanding concepts in light of Islamic perspective (Sana).*

Teachers appear to be role models for their students therefore sometimes teachers even play a more influential role as compared to any other source. The narration of the participants reflects that they give credit to her teacher for the conceptual clarity of their religion.

Account of Sana reflects that her teacher is competent enough that she is able to relate religious concepts with her lectures. It reflects that when a teacher relates social issues and concept with religious teachings, it not only makes their teaching effective but give understanding of religion to the young minds.

## Media

Narrations of participants reflect that the media helped them in the development of their religious identity. Exposure of media for the adolescent population has been remarkably increased in the previous few years. Media plays an important role in the development of the religious identity of individuals (Hoover, 2006).

*Whenever I watch any video with religious content, it increases my knowledge and refreshes my level of Eman (Mavra).*

*I was worried about my 8th class result ... then I searched some wazaif from YouTube and these Wazaif really worked (Sana).*

The narration above reflects that media is an important source of information for the participant and she experiences nourishment of her belief system. Visual media represents things in a much better manner and visual content leaves long-lasting impact as compared to any other source. Narration of Sana reflects that she considers YouTube as an authentic source of information, therefore, she searches Wazaif for success in exams and her trust in the source is validated because she thinks that good scores in the exam are because of these Wazaif. It reflects that media is so powerful that it can lead towards shaping the religious identity of individuals. It also reflects that adolescents show their association with religion because it helps them to solve their daily problems.

## Personal Preference

Personal preferences appeared as a unique factor influencing the religious identity of adolescents. It is basically marked with an internal inclination towards religion and religious commitments.

*I like to read religious literature... book reading is my hobby (Adila).*

*There was a time when I was having a lot of confusions about religious matters, but Alhamdulillah all confusions are almost finished...I search for literature and ask questions from religious scholars (Ali).*

*I love to ask questions about religion and listen to stories about the lives of various Prophets (Ahmad).*

Individual differences are found in choices, interests, and hobbies and in the same line, the current study reveals that some participants are having a strong tendency to gain religion-related knowledge and to perform religious practices. The account of participants reflects that personal tendency towards exploration matters a lot and it shapes the religious identity of adolescents.

## **Discussion**

Religious identity appeared as an amalgamation of beliefs, practices, and belongingness, which is determined by various factors (viz., parental influence, the influence of grandparents, peer influence, media, teachers' power, the influence of religious preachers, and personal preferences).

Thematic analysis revealed that the most important part and root of religious identity is belief system. Belief is the essence of religious identity, once it is well internalized, it leads towards appropriate religious behavior and strong belongingness with religion is developed. In line with previous research, the current study demonstrated that religious belief moves from one generation to another generation and is accepted by adolescents as it is, without exploration (Copen & Silverstein, 2008; Goodman & Dyer, 2020). Therefore, all the participants are found to be on the foreclosure status as they have committed to their religious identity without any proper exploration. According to Brown (2013), it is the strength of every religion that it travels between generations and it remains similar without any change, especially among the young generation. Tawakul is marked with sole reliance on Allah Tala, appeared as the unique ingredient of the religious belief of adolescents in the current study. Tawakul is considered as the peak of belief system and usually it is experienced by the adults. Interestingly, most of the participants reported having Tawakul on Allah Tala. It appeared that adolescents are mature enough to use Tawakul as a healthy coping mechanisms to deal with the negative life events.

The second component of religious identity appeared in the current study was behavior. Behavior is the outcome of belief. The depth of belief is directly linked with the regularity and consistency in religious behavior. The results also showed that the participants had strong emotional attachment and association with the religion and they showed belongingness with religion because they conceived their religion superior and a kind of relationship with God that contributed to their religious identity. Results are in line with McPhail (2019) that elonging to religion can have many aspects, including a sense of identity, confidence that one knows the truth about the supernatural, hostility toward people who do not belong, emotional attachment to the group, and fellowship with other members.

As the channels to the development of religious identity concern, parents appeared as a significant determinant of religious identity of our sample. Results are consistent with previous literature that parents influence the religious ideology of individuals. Literature also suggests that parents transmit their values and beliefs to their children via direct training and instruction to children, and social learning or role modeling that demonstrates desired outcomes for children (Yi et al., 2004). Any or all of these mechanisms may be operating in the transmission process to maintain continuity across generations. Studies have shown that parents exert a lasting imprint on the religious ideologies and commitments of their children (Bengtson, 2013; Myers, 2004). Previous studies have reported that the impact of parents on the religious identity of adolescents is greater than teachers and friends (Fisherman, 2011). Parents have a significant part to play in shaping the faith identity of children and engaging them in religious activities. Most parents see religion as a way of life that is transmitted between generations. Parents consider it a part of their parenting responsibility to pass on their faith (Howarth et al., 2008). The sample of the current study reported that mothers were more religious and mothers played a more important role in the development of religious belief and behavior. Results are in accordance with Brown (2013) that mothers are typically the keepers of family faith and known to steer the life of children with the parameter of religion. Interestingly, the analysis revealed that consistency of parental religious behavior

played a positive role in identity development and where inconsistency appeared in the religious behavior and training of parents, their role becomes controversial and inconsistent.

Thematic analysis has shown the significant influence of grandparents on the religious identity development of adolescents. In the same line, previous research indicates that grandparents play an increasingly important role in the lives of their grandchildren (Bengtson, 2001). Owing to increases in life expectancy over the 20th century, grandchildren spend more time with grandparents in their lives than ever before, increasing opportunities for shared activities and mutual benefit (Uhlenberg, 2005). Grandparents commonly share stories and experiences with their grandchildren, providing a "cultural window" into family history and traditions (Pratt & Fiese, 2004).

Peer influence in the development of religious identity of adolescents in our study is in line with the literature ( e.g., Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Regnerus et al., 2004). Adolescents spend a significant amount of time in learning at school (Huang, 2020). The relationship of adolescents with peers and teachers play important role in the lives of adolescents (Wang & Holcombe, 2010). Peers significantly contribute in the socialization of religious commitments. Since much of adolescents' time is spent in educational or extracurricular activities, they internalize what they perceive desirable in their peers. Having highly religious peers significantly contributes in the religiosity of adolescents (Desmond et al., 2010; Gunnoe & Moore, 2002; Regnerus et al., 2004). Conversely, Pearce and Denton (2011) found that influence of peer was not absolutely direct on the adolescents' religiosity because adolescents do not discuss religious content frequently. It indicates that the influence of peer is spurious explained by other characteristics that peers tend to have in common. According to Verhoeven et al. (2019) proclaim that peers are so important in the life of adolescents as in school setting norms of peers influence the identity development of individuals.

Teachers, religious leaders and media also appeared to have strong impact on the development of religious identity of our study sample. The results of the current study are in line with the previous study which revealed that religious beliefs and values of teachers were so important that it determined the religious identity of individuals (Nelson, 2010).

Teachers, religious leaders and media also appeared to have strong impact on the development of religious identity of our study sample. The results of the current study are in line with the previous study which revealed that religious beliefs and values of teachers were so important that it determined the religious identity of individuals (Nelson, 2010).

School teachers possess an incredible opportunity to shape a student's life in an incredible way (Wang, 2012). Religious instructors carry a special responsibility to deliver meaningful and effective teaching. Bertram-Troost et al. (2009) reported similar findings regarding the influence of religious preachers or instructors on the religious identity development of individuals. Parents and young people alike recognized pressures from peers, the media and mainstream adolescent culture for young people to make choices that did not necessarily fit with their family's religious beliefs and practices. Dinter (2006) reported that computer usage (social media) contributes to adolescents' religious identity formation.

Most of the factors are similar to the previous studies but personal preference is the unique factor that influences the religious identity of adolescents. It is interesting that participants are having an internal inclination for religion-related knowledge. Findings of current research do not indicate any particular form of gender differences in the components or factors of religious identity.

### **Practical Implications**

Findings of current study can be used in clinical, counseling and educational settings. Teachers should be trained and the role of media can be shaped to develop successful religious identity among adolescents. Current study highlights that religious training by parents is considerably effective but consistency in religious practice of parents is also a significant influential factor in the development of un baffled religious identity. Therefore parents can be guided to bring consistency in their religious practice, if they want their children to develop a non-conflicting religious identity. Study has provided theoretical model of religious identity development and invites other researchers to quantitatively test this model and validate this process of religious identity. On the basis of empirical findings, it would ultimately help counselors to devise strategies for the development of healthy religious identity



## Limitations and Suggestions

Only Muslim sample was drawn to ensure the homogeneity of the sample and also due to time constraint to complete the research project, so in future sample from other major religions should be included in a research projects. The study was purely qualitative and we cannot generalize the results of study. It is suggested that on the basis of the theoretical framework provided by the current study, further quantitative researches can be conducted to validate the findings of current study. Furthermore, quantitative study will help in ensuring the external validity of current findings.

## Conclusion

Religious identity appeared to play very important role in the life of adolescents. All the participants appeared to be identified with their religion, so it can be concluded that adolescents perceive that religion is something that integral part of their life and is not questionable. Differences in the individuals are found on the basis of differences in belief, behavior and belongingness. Differences in these components may be because of difference in factors that influence religious identity.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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### **Ethics approval and consent to participate**

The study was approved by The Punjab Higher Education Commission, Pakistan. Permission to collect data was taken from the parents and the participants, and informed consent was taken from the parents of the participants of the study.

### **Consent for publication**

Consent approved by the authors

### **Availability of data and materials**

Not Applicable

### **Competing Interests**

The authors are well informed and declared no competing interests

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### **Authors' contribution**

S.S.B. conceived the idea, designed the study, supervised the research project from data collection to data analysis, reporting and preparing this particular manuscript. S.G. prepared interview schedule, collected the data, analyzed the data, prepared a report and contributed in the preparation of this manuscript under the supervision of S.S.B. Both authors contributed equally in this manuscript and are responsible for the content. Both authors have read and approved the manuscript, and ensure that this is the case.