

Research Article
Araştırma Makalesi

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Research on the Relationship Between Religious Education and Authoritarianism

Abstract

The positive relationship between religiosity and authoritarianism has been underlined in several studies. However, such studies have not taken into account the source and formation of religious education and whether or not the religious education approaches of the devotees paved the way for authoritarianism. In our study, the relationship between religious education and authoritarianism is examined. Individuals' authoritarian affinities, which tend to change according to the institutions at which they receive religious education, were identified. A Likert-type scale was employed and a correlation matrix was applied to the variables. The sample included a total of 315 subjects (204 females and 111 males) studying at various faculties in Uludağ University.

Keywords

Religiosity, Authoritarianism, Dogmatism, Prejudice.

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Introduction

During the Second World War, a group of researchers developed the authoritarian personality concept while investigating the social and psychological roots of fascism. The main hypothesis of these researchers was that an individual's political, economical and social beliefs create an intertwined and harmonized pattern which appears to be formed by mentality or *spirit*. This pattern is a reflection of inclinations that are deeply rooted in an individual's personality (Adorno et al.1050, 1).

According to aforementioned studies, authoritarian personality is a dynamic organization. The elements that compose this organization are inclinations with roots that extend to deep places, including the unconscious. These inclinations bring about aggressiveness, submissiveness, conservatism, anti-intraception, superstitions, rigidity, prejudice and racism. In short, the term "authoritarian" covers a dogmatic, rigid, suspicious, submissive and prejudiced personality type full of superstitions (Sanford 2006, 72, 73; Kağıtçıbaşı 1972,11; Kağıtçıbaşı 1973, 3; Türkođan 1996, 147). The authoritarian personality, which was at first highly praised by Nazi psychologists, was viewed as an insufficient and negative personality structure by Fromm, Maslow, Sartre and Adorno et al. Moreover, this personality trait was used to explain destructive acts of humanity (Kağıtçıbaşı 1973, 3; Hare and Lamb 1986, 30).

Thanks to the leading research conducted by Adorno and his colleagues, the relationship between religiosity and authoritarianism has been the topic of several studies. Putney and Midleton found that orthodox students were inclined to be authoritarian (see Sanua 1977, 181). According to Argyle and Hallahmi's (1975, 95) research, there is quite a strong relationship between authoritarianism and orthodox beliefs, whereas there is an inverse relationship between authoritarianism and humanitarianism. In addition, there is quite a weak relationship between faithlessness and authoritarianism. Leak and Randal (1995) detected the presence of a relationship between conventional religiosity and authoritarian attitudes. Similarly, in a study conducted with Israeli students, Rubinstein (1995) found that Orthodox and Ultra-Orthodox Jews had high levels of authoritarian scores. In their research on Indonesian Muslims, Ji and İbrahim (2007) found that Muslims who were traditionally religious had high authoritarian scores.

According to common belief, authoritarian personality (also called anti-democratic personality) was mostly prevalent in rightist, conservative individuals. Research has demonstrated, however, that leftists, faithless people and liberals could be authoritarian as well (Rokeach 1960, 110,111). Some researchers, on the other hand, have claimed that Authoritarian Personality Theory has no universal validity and have pointed out the criticism related to the measurement tools employed in these studies (Harlak 200, 19,21).

As leading studies, the works of Adorno et al. asserted that religious individuals were unquestionably submissive and therefore authoritarian. Originating from this assumption, the question arose regarding whether religious people, being authoritarian, dogmatic and prejudiced, imposed their beliefs upon others by exercising a fascist pressure or practicing their beliefs in a destructive manner. If religious people tend to have authoritarian, prejudiced and anti-democratic inclinations, do they follow fascist

methods? This hypothesis was neither logically nor experimentally proved. For instance, as suggested by the research conducted on 533 Manitoba University students, Christian Orthodoxies had no prejudiced authoritarian inclinations (see Altemeyer and Hunsberger 1992, 166).

In Turkey, on the other hand, studies on the authoritarian personality are very limited in number. According to research by Kağıtçıbaşı (1970, 1972) and additional studies from Bursa (1979), Turks appeared to have high authoritarian personality types. The notion that this led to fascism, hypothesized by Adorno et al., was visible in Turkey as well (Batmaz 2006, 14,15). Recent studies have found that, compared to faithless people, religious individuals were more authoritarian and prejudiced (Gürses 2001, 107-118). Likewise, research by Kağıtçıbaşı also suggested that religious people were more authoritarian and had stronger external loci of control (Kağıtçıbaşı 1997, 92, 93).

Scope and Objective of Research

As indicated by the results of several previous studies, there is a positive relationship between religiosity and authoritarianism. Nevertheless, the structure of religious education and whether or not it paved the way to authoritarianism was not questioned in most of these studies. For this reason, the current study will examine the relationship between religious education and authoritarian personality types. Does a relationship exist between religious education and authoritarianism? Are there any different effects on personality based on whether religious education is obtained from official institutions, such as Divinity Faculty, Imam and Preacher School (IPS), or religious sects? In short, what is the effect of receiving or not receiving religious education on identity construction? Such questions constitute the scope of our research.

Two main variables were used in this study. Both variables were related to religious education and personality. Religious education-related variables (independent variables) were the following:

1. **Not** receiving religious education in secondary school, aside from a religious science course. (With the 1980 Constitution religion lessons became compulsory in Turkey.)

2. Receiving serious religious education from the family during childhood.

3. Receiving sufficient religious education from an adopted religious sect.

Our second variable, the personality-related variable (dependent variable), was authoritarianism.

Method

Population and Sample

Our sample was composed of Uludağ University students in Bursa, Turkey. The sample was randomly selected from students in Uludağ University's Divinity Faculty,

Arts and Sciences Faculty, Philosophy Department and Education Faculty Classroom Teaching Department.

Of the 315 subjects, 204 were female and 111 were male. One hundred seventy-five students were from Faculty of Theology, 73 were from the Philosophy Department of Faculty of Arts and Sciences and 67 were from the Department of Classroom Teaching of Faculty of Education at Uludağ University. One hundred seventy-three subjects were graduates of IPS, and 142 were graduates of regular high schools.

Measurement Tools and Application

A Likert-type scale was used in this research. Scales that were related to our scope and were used in other studies were also employed (see Gürses 2001). The questionnaires were conducted in the aforementioned faculty classes by following a group-administered questionnaire method.

Correlation analysis was performed on the variables selected for this research. In the field of psychology, the most extensively used observation method is usually the correlation method. "Correlation method" is a term that most often expresses a specific analysis testing the relationship between two variables.

Data from the questionnaire were entered into Statistica, a computerized statistical program. The data were evaluated via correlation matrices and cross-tabulation.

FINDINGS

Table 1: Correlation Matrix ($p < 0.05$)

N=315	V10	V16	V17	V27	V28
V7	-.207	.060	.056	.182	.057
	p= .000	p= .290	p= .319	p= .001	p= .316
V8	-.113	.049	.089	.106	-.080
	p= .045	p= .383	p= .114	p= .061	p= .158
V9	-.111	.066	.138	.159	-.016
	p= .048	p= .240	p= .014	p= .005	p= .773
V11	.022	.021	-.000	.090	-.081
	p= .704	p= .717	p= .996	p= .110	p= .151
V12	.061	-.072	-.039	-.029	.055
	p= .284	p= .203	p= .487	p= .608	p= .333
V13	.019	.083	.005	.154	-.066
	p= .733	p= .140	p= .930	p= .006	p= .244

The variable for **not receiving** any religious education in secondary education aside from compulsory religion lessons is item **10**. The relationship between this

variable and items **7, 8** and **9**, which measure **authoritarianism**, is strongly meaningful yet negative. This correlation indicates that subjects whose religious education was merely confined to secondary education institutions were less authoritarian.

The independent variable for subjects who received serious religious education from their families in childhood is item **17**. This variable, which indicates inter-family religious education, was found to be correlated with item **9**, one of the items measuring **authoritarianism**. This relationship is meaningful at the $p=.014$ level. Accordingly, subjects who receive their religious education within family tend to be more authoritarian than those who receive this training only at secondary education institutions.

Item **27** is the variable for subjects who received religious education from their own religious sect. The relationship between this variable and items **7, 9** and **13**, which measure **authoritarianism**, was determined. The relationships are meaningful and positive. In line with this deduction, it is obvious that receiving religious education from a sect has a strong and meaningful relationship with authoritarianism.

Interpretation and Discussion

The results of this study revealed that individuals whose religious education was limited to secondary education institutions did not exhibit any positive relationship with authoritarianism. It is evident that the atmosphere formed by religion lessons in secondary education does not create an environment that leads to authoritarian inclinations. Considering the fact that authoritarian individuals have anti-democratic personalities, it is expected that these individuals whose religious education was given merely by secondary education institutions develop democratic personalities.

Those who received their religious education from the family exhibited a relationship only with obedience to parents and seniors among the authoritarianism-related variables. Since obedience to parents and seniors is the norm in Turkey, this obedience should not be viewed as an authoritarian submission. It implies that while teaching religion to their children, parents teach them obedience as well.

As for the relationship between authoritarian values and receiving religious education from one's own religious sect, it was found that those who receive this form of religious education possess numerous authoritarian personality traits. It is highly probable that the rigid, effective rules within the sect create quite a harsh hierarchical structure, and total obedience to orders make individuals more authoritarian and dogmatic. Moreover, these individuals are expected to be strongly prejudiced, though no prejudice against secular and faithless groups was found. Yet prejudices against Alawites still exist, and this deduction was also exhibited in other studies (Yapıcı 2004, 277; Uysal and Ayten 2005, 37). According to this research, a strong correlation was detected between level of religiosity and prejudice against Alawites. It becomes evident that religious sects developed a change of attitude towards secular and faithless groups. We are happy to note that lately this positive change of attitude at certain levels has been observable towards Alawites in both political and social arenas.

The relationship between demographic variables and personality variables was examined in this research. No relationship between gender and authoritarianism was found. A meaningful yet weak relationship was established between faculty variable and authoritarianism. Relationships were not strong enough to create obvious differences among faculties. Based on these ratios, it is rather difficult to mention a constructed “theologian personality” or “philosopher identity.” However, if we must make a classification according to scores of faculties, it can be alleged that theologians have more authoritarian attitudes. In the same way, weak but meaningful relationships were discovered between faculty variable and dogmatism. Accordingly, Divinity Faculty students have more dogmatic affinities than Philosophy department students, while Philosophy students are more dogmatic than Education Faculty students. It is possible that students in the Divinity or Philosophy departments had their own fixed dogmas. Both religion and philosophy claim to demonstrate wisdom and truth. For this very reason, it is normal for the students at these two faculties to have dogmatic tendencies however slight they might be. And yet, these findings are not strong enough to allow us to conclude that the students concerned are closed minded. One of the areas analyzed in this research is the personality traits of questionnaire participants according to their high schools. Once we take into account the distribution of high school variables according to authoritarianism variables, we see that IPS graduates are more obedient. Since this medium level obedience is directed towards parents and seniors, however, it is rather susceptible to changes in social norms. Therefore, this obedience should not be viewed as direct authoritarian submission. In terms of submission to the State, IPS graduates also seem to be more obedient than regular high school graduates.

In earlier, similar studies (see Gürses 2001; Rubinstein 1995; Ji and Ibrahim 2007), devotees appeared to be more authoritarian than non-devotees. This study also examined authoritarian personality traits in terms of their relationships with religious education variables. Results reveal that although subjects exhibited authoritarian traits, they were not at high levels. Previous studies found that devotees exemplified high authoritarian inclinations at a time when devotees – due to pressure from media - were greatly oppressed. It is a known fact that individuals demonstrate authoritarian tendencies in such oppressive environments (see Gürses 2001, 145-150). Since these pressures are no longer in existence, individuals will now develop more democratic personalities more readily.

Conclusion

- The conclusion of this research revealed that subjects who received their religious education in secondary education institutions were not authoritarian and were less likely to exhibit dogmatic tendencies.
- Those who received religious education in religious sects tended to be more authoritarian.
- Gender was not a significant factor in the formation of authoritarian personality traits.
- Divinity School students are more authoritarian and dogmatic than Education Faculty and Philosophy Department students, yet they are less prejudiced.

- IPS graduates are more authoritarian than regular high school graduates.
- According to these results, families should reconsider their perceptions regarding Divinity Faculty, Imam and preacher school religious educations.
- Negative personality traits detected in this research are not fixed. They are susceptible to changes in the social, political and educational environment.
- The opposite of authoritarian personality, the personality variable used in our study, is democratic personality. As the results indicate, the way to form a democratic political structure is by developing a democratic personality. Therefore, a free environment formed by the State will enable an atmosphere in which democratic personalities can blossom.
- The picture that emerged after this research should be examined in other studies.

Din Eğitimi Otoriteryenizm İlişkisi Üzerine Bir Araştırma

Özet

İkinci Dünya Savaşı yıllarında, bir grup araştırmacı Faşizm'in sosyal ve psikolojik kökenini araştırırken otoriteryen (authoritarian) kişilik kuramını geliştirdiler. Söz konusu olan otoriteryen kişiliğin temel özellikleri kökü derine ve hatta bilinçaltına inen eğilimler olup, saldırganlığa, otoriteye boyun eğmeye, tutuculuğa, başkalarına kolaylıkla açılmamaya (anti-intracception), batıl inançlara, katılığa (rigidity), önyargıya (prejudice) ve ırkçılığa yol açmaktadır. Yani "otoriteryen" denince dogmatik, katı, şüpheli, önyargılarla hareket eden, batıl inançları olan ve otoriteye körü körüne boyun eğmeye yönelen bir kişilik tipi akla gelmektedir. Bir öncü çalışma olarak, Adorno ve arkadaşlarının hazırladığı eser ve onu takip eden çalışmalar boyunca dindar olanların körü körüne bir itaat gösterdiklerine, dolayısıyla da otoriteryen olduklarına inanılmıştır. Biz de bu araştırmamızda gerçekte dindarların otoriteryen olup olmadıklarını ölçmek için bir alan araştırması yaptık. Araştırmamıza 204'ü bayan, 111'i erkek olmak üzere toplam 315 kişi katılmıştır. Öğrencilerin 175'i U. Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi, 73'ü U. Ü. Fen Edebiyat Fakültesi Felsefe Bölümü, 67'si ise U. Ü. Eğitim Fakültesi Sınıf Öğretmenliği Bölümü öğrencisidir. Bu öğrencilerin 173'ü İHL mezunu, 142'si ise düz lise mezunudur. Araştırma sonucunda din eğitimi orta öğretim kurumlarından alan deneklerin otoriteryen olmadıkları ve bu bireylerin daha az dogmatik olma eğiliminde oldukları tespit edilmiştir. Dini cemaat içerisinde din eğitimi alanların ise daha otoriteryen olma eğiliminde oldukları tespit edilmiştir. Araştırma sonuçlarına göre dinî cemaatlerin mensuplarını otoriteryen bir kişiliğe büründürdükleri görülmüş, kolayca itaat eden bu bireylerin dini cemaat çevresinde oldukça tercih edilen bir kişilik olduğu gözlenmiştir.

Keywords

Dindarlık, Otoriteye Bağlılık, Dar Kafalılık, Önyargı.

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