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Religiocentric Expression, Intolerance, and Conflict between Majority and Minority Ethnic Groups in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Using Social Psychological perspectives we analyze how religiocentric expression influences conflict via intolerant behavior between majority and minority ethnic groups in Bangladesh. In so doing, a total of 555 men (majority group n = 140, minority group n= 415) were randomly selected from northwestern villages of Bangladesh. The descriptive results revealed that Muslim and Hindu men had relatively higher scores on religiocentric expression and intolerance than Santal and Oraon men were significantly related to conflict. The results from SPSS Process Macro 4 suggested that higher level of intolerance of the Muslim and Hindu men than the Santal and Oraon men partially mediated the associations between religiocentric expression and conflict, after accounting for sociodemographic characteristics. Interreligious intolerance is an important mediator by which religiocentric expression induces conflict between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh. Future directions for public policy and research are discussed.

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With the advancement of religious diversity and human freedom religious symbolic and expressive behaviors widely occurred in education, workplace, political platform, public speaking, business, and communication media have increased conflict between majority and minority ethnic groups across multicultural societies (Carmella, 2011; Lawrence & King, 2008; Lieberman & Winzelberg, 2009; Post, 2003; Temperman, 2011). Research has consistently identified religiocentric behavior as a strong predictor of prejudice and conflict between majority dominant and minority groups in societies (Dangubić, Verkuyten, & Stark, 2021; Howard, 2018; Hirsch, Verkuyten, & Yogeeswaran, 2019; Hambler, 2016; Rollins, 2007; Temperman, 2011; Velthuis, Verkuyten, Noll, & Smeekes, 2022). In Bangladesh, religious ethnocentric expression (e. g., our religion and ethnicity is better than others) occurring in diverse contexts negatively influences inter-religious relation between majority (e.g., Muslims) and minority groups (e.g., Hindu, Christian, Buddhist, tribal) (Singh, 2018; Uddin,

2022). Consequently, intolerance, discrimination, perceived threat, and conflict between majority and minority groups are increasing in Bangladesh (Temperman, 2011; Uddin, 2022). In current literature, we much know about the negative effects of religious ethnocentric expression on inter-group relations and its negative consequences (e.g., injustice, stress, anxiety, tension, threat, and conflict) between majority and minority groups (Aarøe, 2012; Benefiel, Fry, & Geigle, 2014; Cole, 2016; Carr, 2017; Kranz, 2007; Kalin & Siddiqui, 2020; Lawrence et al., 2008; Lieberman et al., 2009; Maliepaard & Phalet, 2012; Rollins, 2007). Much less is known about how religiocentric expression influences intolerance that, in turn, induces conflict between majority and minority groups (Hambler, 2016; Clarke, Powell, & Savulescu, 2013). Based on theory and research we explore and analyze how religiocentric expression in social places influences intolerance that, in turn, induces conflict between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh.

Theoretical Framework

Since the early 20th century religiocentric approach is widely used in psychology, sociology, and anthropology to explain ethno-religious conflict in multicultural societies. According to Corsini (1999), religiocentrism is the conviction that a person's own religion is more important or superior to other religions. It also refers to ethnically-based sentiments of exclusiveness without any implication of their moral worth or justifiability….. By analogy, religiocentrism is derived here to mean religious sentiments of exclusiveness-beliefs that entail *ipso facto* devaluative judgments of other religions. According to Chalfant, Beckley, & Palmer (1994), religiocentrism may refer to the feelings of rightness and superiority resulting from religious affiliation that inhibits the ability of a society to achieve adaptation, integration, and goal-attainment. Religiocentrism assumes that religiocentric behavior of a group produces adverse effects on other groups. Further, it prevents mutual understanding and incites conflict when negative actions and intimidating, humiliating expressive words of a religious group are seen as moral and real threats toward another religious group (Njoroge & Kirori, 2014). Religious identity theory and conservative perspective assert that highly identified individuals with conservative attitudes of a religious group might express more their religious superiority and purity than those who identify as more liberal or progressive. They might express more humiliating, intimidating, and neglecting words toward another religious group (Banyasz, Tokar, & Kaut, 2016). M. Abu-Nimer (2004) distinguished between 'religiocentrism' and 'religiorelativism'. According to Abu-Nimer, A religiorelativistic person is firm in his or her belief that other religions have the right to exist and be practiced, even if such norms and beliefs are contradictory to one's own set of religious beliefs. Such a person is prone not to engage in conflict or discriminatory actions against other believers. In contrast, a religiocentric person is a believer who denies other religions' 'truth' and who holds an absolute truth that leaves no room for different religious practices. Such a person becomes more prone to express hate speech, dehumanize, humiliate, exclude, and discriminate against other religious groups and individuals. As a result, negative, humiliative, and destructive exposures in the social, cultural, and political context may create conflict between two religious/ethnic groups. This non-violent conflict expressed by religiocentric persons' beliefs and practices is exacerbated and translated into violence against an enemy (different other). Following this theoretical orientation, some research has found that higher levels of religious orientation and religiosity are significantly associated with conflict between religious groups (Banyasz et al., 2016; Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005; Patai,

1987). Based on a religious ethnocentric approach, Patai (1954, 1987) found that there were wide religious conflicts between the major ‘theistic’ and ‘nontheistic’ religions across societies. In line with Patai’s hypothesis, some research has found that there is a rampant communal violence between Hindus and Buddhists in Sri Lanka, between Hindus and Muslims, and between Sikhs and Hindus in India (Uddin, 2022).

Religiocentric Expression, Intolerance, and Conflict

Religious expression via tolerance or intolerance influences conflict between two religious groups in a geographical context. Patai (1954) conceptualized that each religion has a definite outlook on its own value in relation to that of other religions. The outlook of a particular religion over the others may range from complete tolerance to the complete lack of it, with the corresponding range of self-evaluation. Based on a religiocentric approach he compared Middle Eastern, Far Eastern, and Western cultures and found that religion in the Far East is completely absent of religio-centrism. That is religion in the region marked by tolerance of other religions and that is mutual borrowing and influencing; in the Middle East and in the West there is a high degree of religio-centrism, with intolerance and scorn of other religions. That is each religion is exclusive and regards itself as the ‘one and only’ true faith (p.252).

Based on social psychological theory and literature Batson (2013), Powell & Clarke (2013) and Whitehouse (2013**)** examined a causal relationship between religion and tolerance and conflict in a sociopolitical context. They found that ritualistic and routinized behaviors enhanced tolerance within the religious group, but increased intolerance or hostility between religious groups. Particularly, Batson (2013) argued that while extrinsic religion is associated with proscribed prejudice, intrinsic religion is not - but the latter is nevertheless associated with prejudices that are not proscribed by one's religion. In contrast, the quest orientation towards religion is not associated with either proscribed or non-proscribed prejudices and is associated with increased tolerance. Johnson (2013) argued that religion is an evolutionary adaptation that promotes the functioning of social groups. In the context of significant inter-group conflict in human evolution, religion may have been favored by natural selection due to fitness benefits that accrue to the group. It is argued that religion is an adaptation for war, steeling us against fear, encouraging self-sacrifice and heroism, and providing us with a propensity to dehumanize our enemies, making it easier to overcome moral qualms about killing them. As an adaptation for war, religion promotes in-group cooperation and a strong intolerance of out-groups.

Newheiser, Hewstone, Voci, Schmid, Zick & Kupper (2013) reviewed empirical work on the association between religion and intolerance in the contemporary social psychological study of religion and prejudice. In so doing, they conceptualized religion both as a ‘maker’ and an ‘unmaker’ of prejudice. Reviewing large- and small-scale studies on contemporary religiosity and prejudice, tolerance, and conflict, they found religiosity as a predictor of modern prejudice and conflict. They concluded that religiosity continued to hold for contemporary intergroup relations and conflict. Thurow (2013) also found religion causes intolerance or tolerance and conflict. A paper by Coady (2013) explores the issue of religious disagreement as a source of intolerance and civic danger. It clarifies the meaning of the term ‘religion’ and argues that religion is often unfairly blamed for violence and intolerant behavior driven by other factors. Furthermore, it suggests that there is much violence and intolerance that is driven by purely secular ideologies. It also examines the

interplay of religious and political ideas and institutions, showing how ideas of liberalism, freedom of conscience, and the separation of Church and State permeated mainstream Catholic thought in the twentieth century. The exclusion of religion from the public sphere is considered impractical and counterproductive, and a range of suggestions are developed to deal with religious disagreements and to promote compromise and tolerance. Flanagan (2013) addressed the question of why Buddhists and Confucians are more tolerant, less conflict-prone, less war-like, etc., than Abrahamic peoples. Flanaganformulated a hypothesis for how the difference-maker may have to deal with God, or better, with beliefs about God's nature and modus operandi. The hypothesis is not that Buddhism and Confucianism are more rational, less superstitious than the Abrahamic religions. It is that Buddhism and Confucianism have theologies that differ from the Abrahamic ones in ways that make a difference. The research suggests that a lack of belief in a punitive 'know-it-all' God explains why followers of Eastern religions are more tolerant than followers of Abrahamic religions. Taken together, based on social psychological theory and literature past research has conceptualized the relationship between religiosity, tolerance/intolerance, and conflict between religious groups, few studies have empirically tested religiocentric expression via intolerance influences conflict between majority and minority groups in a particular geographical territory.

Bangladesh Context

Ethnically, the Muslims with 77% of the population, are a mixture of different stocks, having with the long traditions of Islamic values, attitudes, beliefs, and ideas and speak in the *Bengali* language with a mixture of *Arabic-Urdu* preference (Maloney, Aziz, & Sarker, 1981). The *Hindus* with 5% of the population are the second largest minority group and speak the Bengali language traced from *Hinduism* (Sarker, 1997). The *Santal* and the *Oraon* (about less than 1% of the population) ethnically belong to *Proto-Australoid* stocks and speak in *Santali*, a group of *Austric-Mundary* languages for the former (Ali, 1998; Kayes, 1995) and *Sadri* and *Kuruk* for the later. Religiously, each ethnic community bears and preserves a distinct belief system: the Muslims believe in *Monotheism,* the oneness of God or *Tawhid*; the Hindus believe in *polytheism,* Gods and Goddesses, some are males and some are females under the creation of almighty *Bhagwan*, and both the Santal and the Oraon believe in *animism,* nature worships such as birth, death, illness, Sun, Moon, stars, rain, air, cyclone and other natural disasters (Ali, 1998; Bandyopadhyay, 1999; Uddin, 2006). Based on the fundamental religious belief systems previous studies have revealed that the Muslim, Hindu, Santal and Oraon have different perceptual and cognitive views of the social and physical universe that distinctly express their behavior to solve personal, familial, and community social problems they face in Bangladesh. Other studies have also mentioned that although all the communities are socio-culturally collectivistic and patrilineal in nature, they observe and practice different religious beliefs embedded in their religious belief-knowledge systems (Narayanan, 2004; Uddin, 2006; 2009).

The religious expression and practices of the ethnic communities may influence tolerance and intolerance between the majority and minority groups in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2006). Based on representative samples several cross-cultural studies reveal that the Muslim compared to the Hindu, Santal and the Oraon are more hierarchical in inter-community relations. Research indicates that Bangladeshi Muslims are the majority in number in population structure and socio-politically more dominant than the Hindu and the Santal and Oraon in inter-community power structure (Uddin, 2017). As

a majority group (e.g. Muslims) is dominant, they express their religion in a wider social context. The minority groups with their lower socio-political dominance suffer more from religious threats from the majority group (Uddin, 2017). Although polite and positive expression of a religious group toward others increases harmony and co-existence, negative expressions, such as humility, interference, and hate speech of the majority religious group toward minority groups induce tension, and conflict between religious groups (Uddin, 2022). Relevant literature reveals that although the majority group is oriented to preach good deeds among their respective creeds, their social prejudice, discrimination, inequality, hatred, and religiocentric behavior toward minority groups induces conflict between the groups.

The Present Study

Based on a religiocentric approach and research, the present study aimed to enhance the understanding of how religious tolerance mediates the association between religious expression and conflict between majority and minority groups. In this study, we tested whether higher expression of religiocentric behavior of the majority group than minority group is significantly associated with conflict between them. Specifically, we examined whether higher intolerant behavior of the majority group than the minority group mediates the association between religious expression and conflict between them. As higher sociopolitical status of the majority group than the minority one influences religious expression, intolerance and conflict in social and public places, we control these variables to understand the association between religious expression and conflict between majority and minority groups. In so doing, we constructed a hypothesized mediation model to answer how religious expression is related to conflict via religious expression between majority and minority groups. The particular hypothesized model is outlined in Figure 1.

Method

Sample

Different religious or ethnic groups (e.g., Muslim, Hindu, Santal, & Oraon) over the several decades have been living side-by-side in the Rajshahi division of Bangladesh. In order to examine and compare how religious expression influences intolerance that in turn induces conflict between majority and minority groups, this study was conducted in the Rasulpur union of Niamathpur of the Rajshahi division of Bangladesh. First of all, present researchers visited multi-religious locales or villages where majority and minority religious groups were living. Based on primary observation we enlisted 1450 preliminary respondents from Rasulpur union. Then a total of 585 men from the list (Muslim n=150, Hindu n=145, Santal n=145, and Oraon n= 145) were finally selected using simple random sampling. The mean age was 38.15 years for Muslims, 38.23 years for Hindus, 38.01 years for Santal, and 37.97 years for Oraon. Most of them, especially the minority groups compared to the majority Muslims were the lower social class in nature (Uddin, 2008). Sample selection by this procedure was more appropriate to create homogeneity for valid cross-cultural comparison of religious expression and conflict among the ethnic communities. As the sample selection and instrument of data collection procedure of the

religious survey among the ethnic groups were scientific in nature, necessary data on religious expression, tolerance, and conflict were collected from the respondents.

Measures

Religiocentric Expression. Previous research has measured religious expression in several ways. Stewart, Edgell and Delehanty (2017) defined religious expression as a preference of private and public religious practices and hypothesized that the respondents with a higher preference for public religious expression than private one have higher prejudice but lower tolerance toward minority religious groups in American society. In order to measure the hypothesis they included four items on religious expression in public life: religion as a good marker of good citizenship ('being religious is important for being a good American' and 'being Christian is important for being a good American'), as a set of rules for living together ('society's rules should be based on God's laws'), and as a source of national leadership ('a President should have strong religious beliefs'). Each of these items used a four-point Likert-type scale of responses ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Based on insight from past research current study included 3 items (Patai, 1987): "Our religion is true but other is false", "Our religion is a complete code of life but other is not", "Our religion is universal but other is not". The participants were asked to rate the degree that they agree with the items on a four-point Likert-type scale of responses, ranging from 4= strongly agree, to 3= agree, 2= disagree, and 1= strongly disagree. The average scores of the three items were higher for Muslim majority group (M = 3.08, SD = 0.78) than minority groups (M = 2.45, SD = 0.58 for Hindu, M = 2.04, SD = 0.34 for Santal and M = 2.23, SD = 0.38 for Oraon). Higher total scores indicated a higher level of religiocentric expression in the majority Muslim group than in the minority groups. The Cronbach's α for the 3 items was .82.

Religious Intolerance Socially, religious intolerance indicates a general negative orientation and stereotyping behavior, feelings and attitudes toward other religions in a particular society. In order to measure religious intolerance, we used 3 items: "We should respect other religions", "Believers of a religion should have the right to practice", Believers of a religion should participate in others' religious festivals (Abu-Nimer, 2004). The participants were asked to rate the degree that they agree with the items on a four-point Likert-type scale of responses, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= agree to 4 = strongly agree. The average scores of the scale were higher for Muslim majority group (M = 3.00, SD = 0.88) than minority groups (M = 2.85, SD = 0.98 for Hindu, M = 2.65, SD = 0.54 for Santal and M = 2.40, SD= 0.58 for Oraon). Higher total scores of the majority group indicated more intolerance than lower total scores of the minority groups in nature. The Cronbach's α for the 3 items was .65.

Religious Conflict. Religious conflict between majority and minority religious groups used as an outcome variable is evident in the villages where different religious groups are living side-by-side and interact with each other for social purposes. In this study, we used 3 items: We should "discriminate", "deprive", and "prohibit", other believers (Patai, 1987). The average scores of the three items were higher for Muslim majority group (M = 2.75, SD = 0.98) than minority groups (M = 2.60, SD = 0.88 for Hindu, M = 2.45, SD = 0.55 for Santal and M = 2.43, SD = 0.53 for Oraon). Higher total scores of the majority group indicated more conflict-prone than lower total scores of the minority groups in nature. The

Cronbach's α for the 3 items was .72.

Covariates This study included age, socioeconomic status, religious identity, religious practice, and community power relations as covariates. Based on self-reported data education was numerically measured in years. Occupation was nominally measured and categorized into 1= farming only, 2= farming + business, 3= farming + employment, 4= day laboring. These occupational status patterns were converted into scaling and coded as 1= highly skillful, 2= moderately skillful and 3= semi-skillful, and 4 no skillful adopted for their livelihood. Yearly total income was numerically measured in Taka (1 US$ = 70 Bangladesh Taka in currency exchange) and then it was categorized into 1= low-income (>20,000), 2= middle-income (21000-30,000), and 3= high-income (31,000+). Religious identity was assessed as 0 = monotheism, 1= polytheism; community power relation was assessed as 1= dominant, 2= less-dominant, and 3= non-dominant relation in rural power structure (see, Table 1).

Methods and Procedure

This study used a comparative survey design to explore the relationship between religious expression and conflict between majority and minority groups. In so doing, a questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions was designed. In order to collect data through the questionnaire, several strategies were followed: (1) As religious beliefs and expressions and conflict were sensitive issues, so we built up rapport with the selected respondents to create consciousness about the research purposes and objectives; (2) we carefully examined and checked the opinions of the respondents on the practice and expression of religious beliefs in a social context; (3) two interviewers were trained up. Using these research strategies background data in the first phase were collected from January – February 2019. Then we followed for ten months - March to December 2019. During this period we collected data on religious expression, religious tolerance, and conflict between majority and minority groups. By the given procedure the data were collected in the afternoon when they were leisured. In so doing, the interviewers conversed with the respondents in *Bengali* language, because they all were able to converse in Bengali language (the national language). After the completion of each interview, special thanks were given to each respondent. The responses to the variables were converted into English by researchers (Brislin, 1980). Although all respondents actively participated in the study, 10 respondents from the majority group and 20 respondents from the minority group were excluded for missing focal variables. After excluding these respondents from the list, the valid sample size was 140 for majority group and 415 for minority group.

Data Analysis Plan

First of all, descriptive statistical tools correlation tests were applied to organize and summarize the data (see, Table 1-2). In so doing, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences, IBM) version 22 was used for descriptive data analysis. These statistical tools also were used for the judgment of normality distribution, accuracy, reliability, or validity for hypothesis testing. Particularly, Pearson's bivariate correlation test was used for relations between religious expression, religious tolerance, and conflict (see, Table 2). Based on religiocentrism and its hypothesized model (see, Figure 1) mediation analysis was conducted using SPSS Process Macro 4 (Preacher and Hayes, 2008). Using this statistical

package, we analyzed parameter estimates for direct, indirect, and total effects of religious expression on religious tolerance and conflict between majority and minority groups. According to Preacher & Hayes (2008), parameter estimates and confidence intervals of the total and indirect effects were generated based on 2000 random samples. Mediation is demonstrated via statistically significant indirect effects (e.g., if the 95% bias-corrected confidence interval for the parameter estimate does not contain zero). We also compared the magnitudes of the mediator or indirect effects. In so doing, all variables were standardized, as suggested by MacKinnon (2000). We also controlled some background variables to understand how religious expression influenced conflict via religious tolerance between the groups. The results of the mediation analysis are presented in Figures 2-4 and Table 3.

Results

Bivariate Correlation

The results shown in Table 2 revealed that there were significant associations between religious expression, religious tolerance and conflict between majority and minority groups, controlling for religious identity and religious practice. Particularly, religious expression was significantly and positively associated with religious tolerance-intolerance ($r = 0.451$, $p<0.01$**).** In turn, religious tolerance was significantly and positively associated with conflict ($r = 0.363$, $p<0.01$) between majority and minority groups.

Mediation Model

Before testing mediation, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) for three latent constructs: religious expression (RE), religious tolerance (RT), and religious conflict (RC) was conducted to identify model fitting. The results of the CFA (Table not found) indicated that the measurement models were fully identified. The factors of the three latent constructs were high from .752 to .452 for RE, from .829 to .687 for RT, and from .814 to .562 for RC respectively. The CFA models fitting with the data were adequate at c^2 (104, N =585, df = 8) = .120.11, p < .05 for RE; c^2 (114, N =585, df = 10) = .121.12, p < .05 for RT; c^2 (116, N =585, df = 5) = .121.15, p < .05 for RC. The other fit indices were well (GFI =.922; TLI = .975; CFI = .982; RMSEA = .041).

We used Preacher Hayes's (2008) approach to test the direct and indirect effects of RE and RT on RC. The results shown in Figure 2 revealed that RE was significantly and directly associated with RC, β = 0.40, $p<0.01$ and RT, β = 0.35, $p<0.01$. RT was significantly and directly associated with RC, β = 0.29, $p<0.01$. The results of the comparative analysis shown in Figure 3 suggested that the direct association between religiocentric expression and conflict-prone behavior was higher in the majority group than in the minority group, β = 0.46 for Muslims, β = 0.40 for Hindus, β = 0.38 for Santal, and β = 0.36 for Oraon, $p<0.01$. The direct association of RE with RT, as well as the association of RT with RC was higher in the majority group than that in the minority group. The results of the indirect effect suggested that RT partially and significantly mediated the association between RE and RC between the groups (β = 0.13). In comparative mediation

analysis, the majority group had higher scores [β = 0.14, 95% CI 0.59-1.15, p<0.001] than that in the minority group [β = 0.13, 95% CI 0.25-1.17, p<0.001]. In addition, socio-demographic covariates such as age, education, income, religious identity, religious practice, and community power relation associated with religious expression played an important part in RC. These covariates were in turn associated with conflict between majority and minority groups. Especially, education (β = 0.12, 95% CI, 0.05-0.46), religious identity (β= 0.25, 95% CI, 1.01-0.0.07) and religious practice (β = 0.18, 95% CI, 0.06-0.08) and community power relation (β = .17, 95% CI, 0.02-0.07) of the majority, compared to the minority group (e.g., education, β = 0.24, 95% CI, 1.13-0.08; religious identity, β = 0.16, 95% CI, 0.42-0.09; religious practice, β = 0.14, 95% CI, 1.13-0.08; power relation, β = 0.10, 95% CI, 0.01-0.06) was more positively linked to RC (see, Figure 4 & Table 3).

Discussion

The purpose of the study was to analyze how religious expression influences conflict between majority (Muslim) and minority ethnic groups (e. g. Hindu, Santal, and Oraon) in northern Bangladesh. In so doing, a total of 555 samples from the majority (Muslim n=140) and minority (n= 415) communities were interviewed, using a questionnaire and scaling. The collected data were analyzed, using descriptive and mediational tools. Overall, the results suggest that religious expression mediating through religious tolerance was significantly related to conflict between majority and minority groups in northern villages. Especially, religious expression was positively related to religious tolerance that in turn was positively and significantly connected to conflict between the two groups. Below, the findings are contextualized in detail.

Religiocentric Expression and Conflict

Religion is correlated with conflict. Based on previous research and evidence this study hypothesized that religious expression was significantly related to conflict between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh. This study found that religious conflict was significantly and positively associated with religious expression between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh. These findings are consistent with and replicated in several previous studies (Abu-Nimer, 2004; Patai, 1987)). For example, Patai (1987) differentiated the major ‘theistic’ and ‘nontheistic’ religions. According to Patai, theistic religion was a pronounced religiocentrism, expressed most poignantly in the conviction that one’s own religion was the one and only true one, but other faiths were erroneous and hence depreciable. This conviction was rooted in the great religious conflicts (wars) which pitted not only Muslims against Christians but also various Muslim sects against one another, and likewise made various Christian denominations bitter enemies. Abu-Nimer (2004) also found that a religiorelativistic person is firm in his or her belief that other religions have the right to exist and be practiced, even if such norms and beliefs are contradictory to one’s own set of religious beliefs. Such a person is prone not to engage in conflict or discriminatory actions against other believers. But a religiocentric person is a believer who denies other religions’ ‘truth’ and who holds an absolute truth that leaves no room for different religious practices. Such a person becomes more prone to express hate speech, dehumanize, humiliate, exclude, and discriminate against other religious groups and individuals. Consequently, negative, humiliative, and destructive exposures in the social, cultural, and political context may create

conflict between two religious/ethnic groups.

Religiocentric Expression, Religious intolerance, and Conflict

Religious tolerance-intolerance mediates the association between religious expression and conflict between majority and minority groups in a society, like Bangladesh. Previous research reveals that when people of a majority group act to suppress religious beliefs and practices of other religions, this situation may provoke civil unrest, conflict, and even violence between rival religious or ethnic groups. Based on the previous research and evidence this study hypothesized that religious expression (measured as polite, mild, and hate expression) may lead to religious tolerance or intolerance that in turn induces conflict between majority and minority ethnic groups in Bangladesh. This study found that most of the Santal (67.59%) and the Oraon minority men (54.48%) were tolerated than the Hindu minority and Muslim majority men, while most of the Muslim majority men (60%) and Hindu minority men were intolerated compared to the Minority groups (45.52% for Oraon, and 32.41% for Santal). These findings of religious tolerance vs. intolerance mediated the association between religious expression and conflict between the majority and minority groups. In a study on the linkage between religion and intolerance and conflict Stouffer (1955) examined the willingness of Americans to extend civil liberties to communists, socialists, and atheists. Stouffer found a significant inverse association between religious commitment (measured as religious participation) and intolerance that in turn influenced conflict between the religious groups in the US. He further discovered that different levels of intolerance were associated with different religious denominations (religious beliefs and identity) between Southern Protestants, Catholics, Northern Protestants, and Jews in America. Research work over the five decades in sociology and political science confirmed these findings (Nunn, Crocket, & Williams, 1978; Sullivan et al., 1982; McClosky & Brill, 1983; Beatty & Walter, 1984; Reimer & Park, 2001). Still others found that a commitment to biblical literalism or adherence to doctrinal orthodoxy explains observed variations in tolerance (Jelen & Wilcox, 1990) that explains the high positive correlation between religion and conflict (Kellstedt et al., 1996; Layman & Green, 1998). The findings of the current study are also replicated in these cross-cultural (Ponton & Gorsuch, 1988; Eisinga, Felling, & Peters, 1990) and cross-ethnic studies.

Newheiser et al. (2013) also found a paradoxical association between religion, intolerance, and conflict. Reviewing large- and small-scale studies on contemporary religiosity and prejudice, tolerance, and conflict, the results from a cross-European nationally representative survey of ‘group-focused enmity’ are presented, which examined religiosity as a predictor of modern prejudice and conflict. They then turned to the ‘unmaking’ of prejudice by religion, describing results from a line of experimental research on the anxiety-buffering, psychologically protective properties of religiosity. They concluded that religiosity continues to hold for contemporary intergroup relations and conflict.

Role of Sociocultural Status

In order to understand and assure the relationships between religious expression and conflict mediating through religious tolerance between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh, this study controlled socio-demographic status

(e.g., age, education, occupation, income, religious identity, religious practice, and community power relation) in the mediating model. This study found that the socioculturally dominant group (majority group) than the non-dominant group (minority group) expressed more religiocentric and intolerant behaviors that were positively linked to religious conflict between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh. These findings are also consistent with previous studies (Allport & Kramer, 1946; Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswik, Levinson & Sanford, 1950; Stouffer, 1955). These studies have shown that relationships between religious expression and conflict covary positively with attitudes, values, dispositions, and behaviors that are conducive to ethnic and religious intolerance, controlling for socio-economic factors, such as age, sex, and geographic location.

Limitations and directions for future research

This research analyzed how religious expression related to conflict, mediating through religious expression between majority and minority groups in northern Bangladesh. Based on religiocentric approach collected data from the representative samples from northern villages analyzed, using descriptive statistical techniques (e.g., frequency distribution, Spearman's ranked-order correlation, chi-square test). This analysis helped understand trends of distribution, organization, and summarization of the data on the key variables used in the study. The descriptive analysis of the data also helped to apply advanced statistical tools for mediating analysis of the key variables used in the study. The methodology and its related findings have both advantages and disadvantages.

In positive aspects of the study, we used mediation model to analyze the total direct and indirect effect (the aggregate mediating effect of all mediators) and specific indirect effect (the mediating effect of a specific mediator). The significance of the indirect effects was to test via bootstrap analysis, which is commonly performed in multiple mediation analysis. The bootstrap approach has some advantages of greater statistical power without assuming multivariate normality in the sampling distribution (Williams & MacKinnon, 2008). We also compared the magnitudes of the mediators or indirect effects.

In disadvantages, our research ability to distinguish the cause (e.g., religious expression) from mere correlation in the field is very limited, because the religious world should be required to carry out controlled manipulations of the variables which were neither practically feasible nor ethically permissible. As a result, most of the work in social and religious studies, as well as ours linking religion, religious expression to intolerance in its equally varied dimensions was far from definitive. Such work has been geared toward identifying appropriate measurable constructs that explain substantial aspects of observed data used in this study. Virtually, all research and also ours on the link between religion, expression, intolerance, and conflict were correlational. Future studies, therefore, should need more than one point in time for data collection and measurement of rigorous validity of the data to analyze causal mediation of religious tolerance-intolerance linking between religious expression and conflict between majority and minority groups in Bangladesh.

Conclusion and Implication

Religious expressive behavior influences conflict between majority and minority groups across societies, including Bangladesh. Based on religiocentric approach this study examined whether religious expression mediating through religious tolerance-intolerance was linked to conflict between majority Muslim and minority communities in Bangladesh. Using representative samples from northern villages this study found that the religious expression of the Muslim majority and Hindu minority groups was higher than the minority Santal and Oraon group in Bangladesh. This religious expression was more likely to induce conflict between Muslim and Hindu groups than the other ethnic (e.g., the Santal and the Oraon) groups. Although the mild and hate expressions of the Muslims and Hindus towards other religions were clearly exposed, these behaviors were partially or fully repressed by the Santal and Oraon men in the study area. As a result, religious expression partially mediating through religious intolerance was positively linked to conflict, controlling for sociocultural status between majority Muslim and minority groups (e.g., Hindu, Santal, & Oraon) in the region. These findings consistent with previous research may have implications for legal and social control policy with caution to improve inter-religious expressive behavior and mutual tolerance in Bangladesh (Uddin, 2015).

Religious expressive behavior has both positive and negative effects on social life. Positive expression (peaceful & polite of a religious group toward other religious groups increases mutual respect, justice, cooperation, forgiveness, appreciation, harmony, and co-existence, while negative or religiocentric expressions (e.g., discrimination, injustice, humility, interference, disrespect, prohibition of religious practices, hate or hatred speech) of a religious group toward others induce tension, conflict and even violence between religious groups (Uddin, 2015). The findings explored in this study may have implications for (1) social policymakers, (2) legal enforcement agencies, and religious leaders.

Ethical Statement

No official ethical approval in Bangladesh was sought to conduct the study, because our respondents were not patients from whom medical/clinical information was collected (Baron-Epel & Kaplan, 2009). Informed consent, therefore, was collected from all participants prior to conducting the research. The authors (A & B) maintained confidentiality, privacy, mutual benefit, and reciprocity in the study process.

Authors' Contribution

The first author contributed major works to develop the manuscript. The second author organized, supervised, and analyzed the data collected in the study.

Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest

Data Availability

Data available on request due to privacy/ethical restrictions.

Code availability

There is no code availability.

Tables and Figures

Table 1. Sample Characteristics by Majority (n = 140) and Minority Group (n = 415), Bangladesh, 2019

Background Characteristics	Majority Group	Minority Group	X^2
Age-grade			
30-34	24.00	22.76	
35-39	48.67	50.34	22.61
40-44	14.00	13.79	(.000)
45+	13.33	13.10	
Education			
Illiterate	30.00	67.59	157.11*
Primary	43.33	22.07	(.000)
Secondary and more	26.67	10.35	
Occupation			
Highly skillful	61.33	59.00	
Moderately skillful	2.67	2.00	359.97*
lowly skillful	16.00	15.60	(.000)
No skillful	20.00	23.4	
Annual family income in Taka			
11000-15000	6.00	15.86	
16000-20000	22.00	34.48	261.60*
21000-25000	13.33	10.34	(.000)
26000-30000	14.67	10.34	
31000+	44.00	28.98	
Religious practice			
Regular	78.67	12.41	529.01
Occasional	14.67	76.56	(000)
Never	6.66	11.03	
Community Power Relation			
Dominant	56.67	19.31	130.30*
Less-dominant	32.67	37.93	(.000)
Non-dominant	10.67	42.76	

*Note: Figures in percentages, df=6, * p<0.01*

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics and Correlation for All Major Variables (N= 555)

1. Religious identity	1	2	3	4	Mean	SD
2. Religious practice	.138*	1.00				
3. Religious expression	.007	.369*	1.00		2.45	0.52
4. Religious tolerance	-.184*	-.220*	.451*	1.00	2.73	0.75
5. Religious conflict	.163*	.340*	.264*	.363*	2.56	0.74

*p<0.05

Table 3. Standardized and Unstandardized Effects by Majority (n= 140) and Minority Group (n=415)

Variables	Religious Conflict					
	Majority Group			Minority Group		
	b	β (SE)	95% CI	b	β (SE)	95% CI
Constant	0.41*	0.24* (.08)	1.12 – 0.42	0.38*	0.19* (.05)	1.20 –0.72
Religious expression	0.40*	0.14* (.04)	0.59 –1.15	0.32*	0.13* (.06)	0.25 –1.17
Religious tolerance	0.36*	0.35** (.06)	119 – 0.94	0.31*	0.32** (.04)	1.03 – 0.68
Age	-0.04	0.06 (.01)	-0.02-0.05	-0.05	0.07 (.02)	-0.04-0.05
Education	0.21	0.12* (.09)	0.05-0.46	0.11	0.24* (.07)	1.13-0.08
Occupation	-0.11	-0.04 (.03)	0.03-0.08	-0.07	-0.11 (.02)	0.04-0.07
Income	-0.03	-0.07 (.08)	0.11-0.05	-0.01	-0.08 (.09)	0.21-0.07
Religious identity	1.20*	0.25* (.04)	1.01-0.07	1.13*	0.16* (.05)	0.42-0.09
Religious practice	0.24*	0.18* (.02)	0.06-0.08	1.14*	0.14* (.03)	1.13-0.08
Power relation	1.25*	0.17* (.04)	0.02-0.07	1.09*	0.10* (.01)	0.01-0.06
	F (3, 140) = 8.11			F (7, 420) = 12.24		

*Note: Variables have been normalized. Bootstrap sample size= 5000. *p<0.05, **p<0.001*

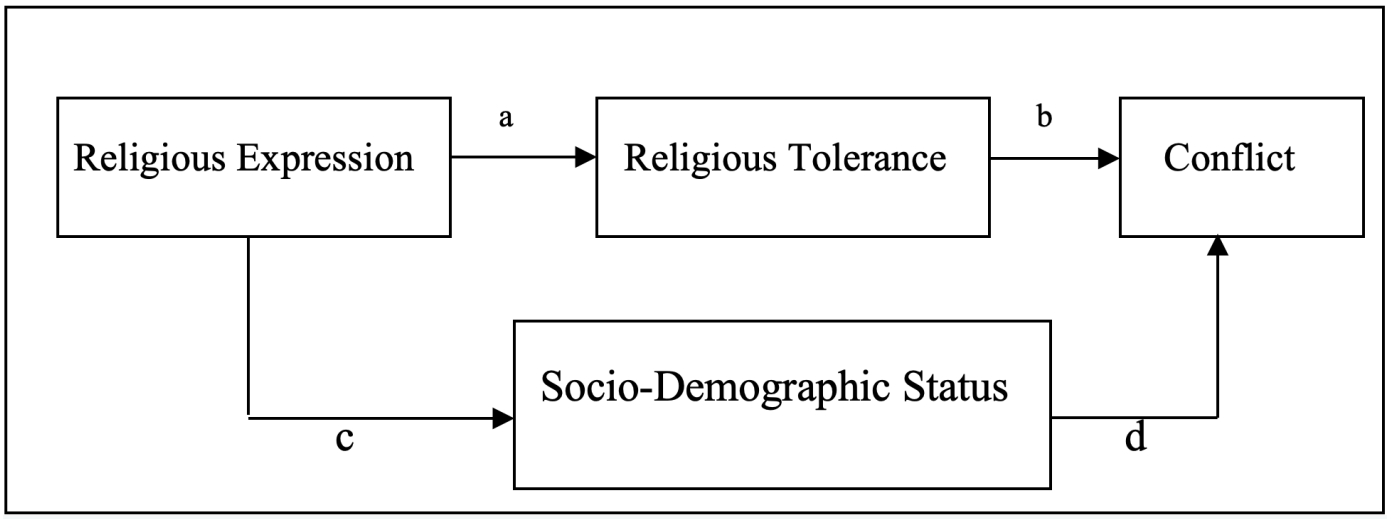
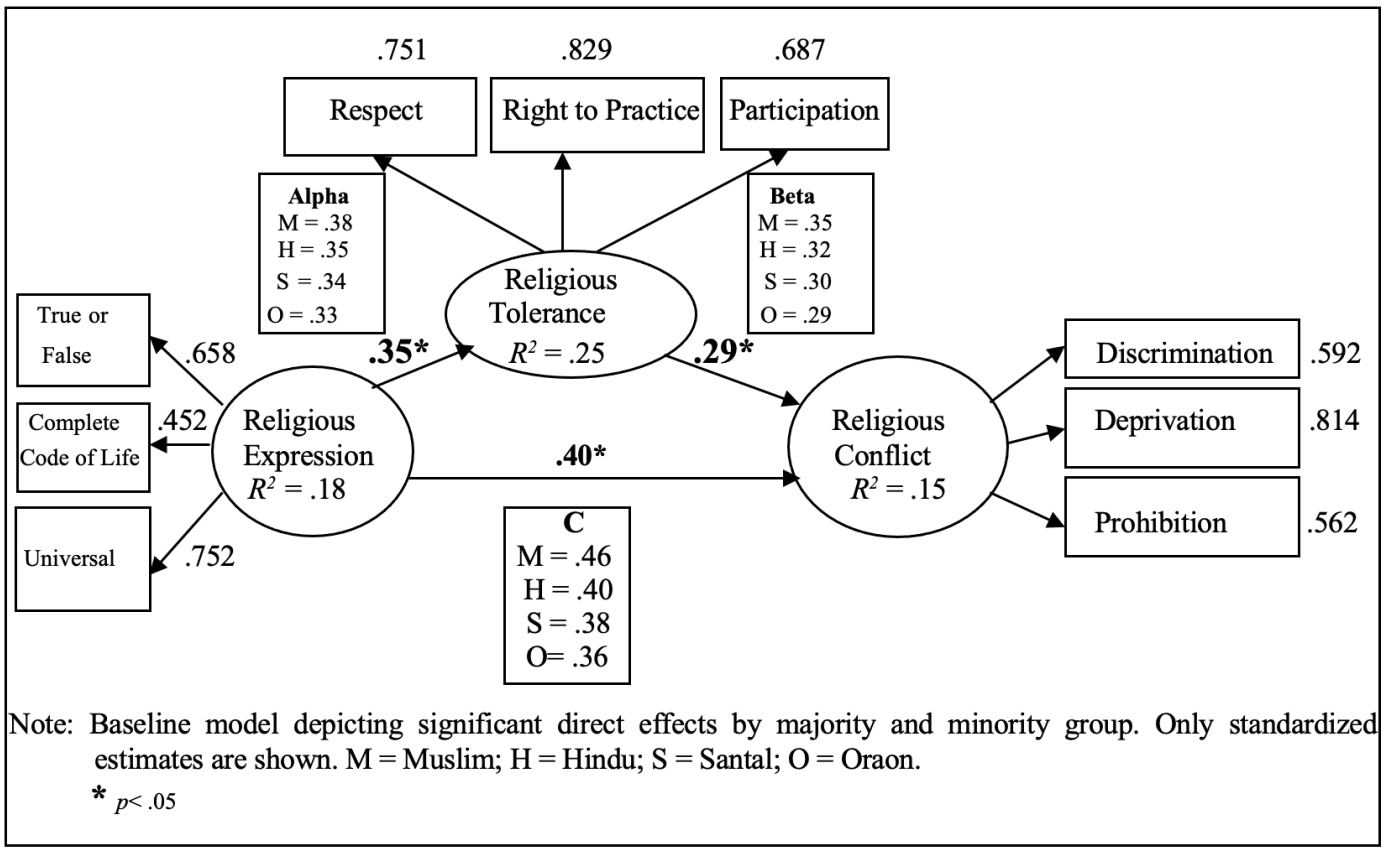


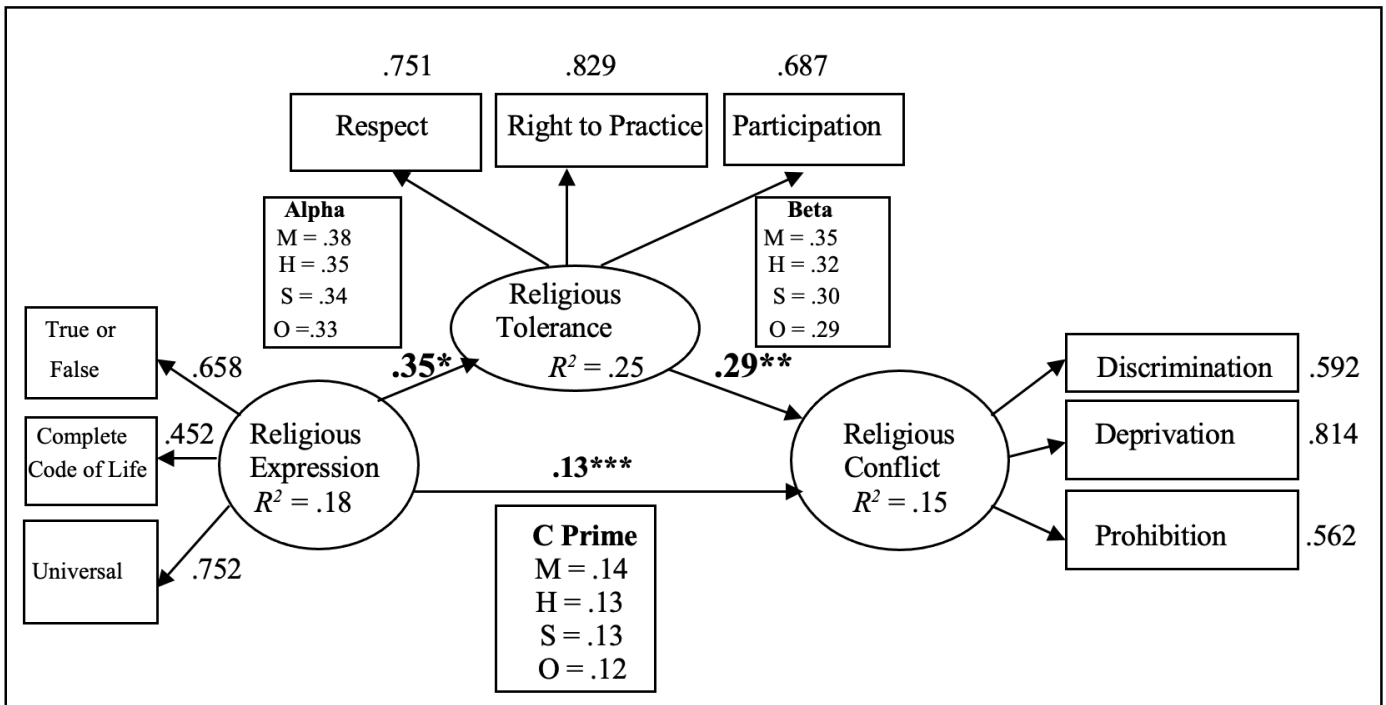
Figure 1. Hypothesized Model



Note: Baseline model depicting significant direct effects by majority and minority group. Only standardized estimates are shown. M = Muslim; H = Hindu; S = Santal; O = Oraon.

* p< .05

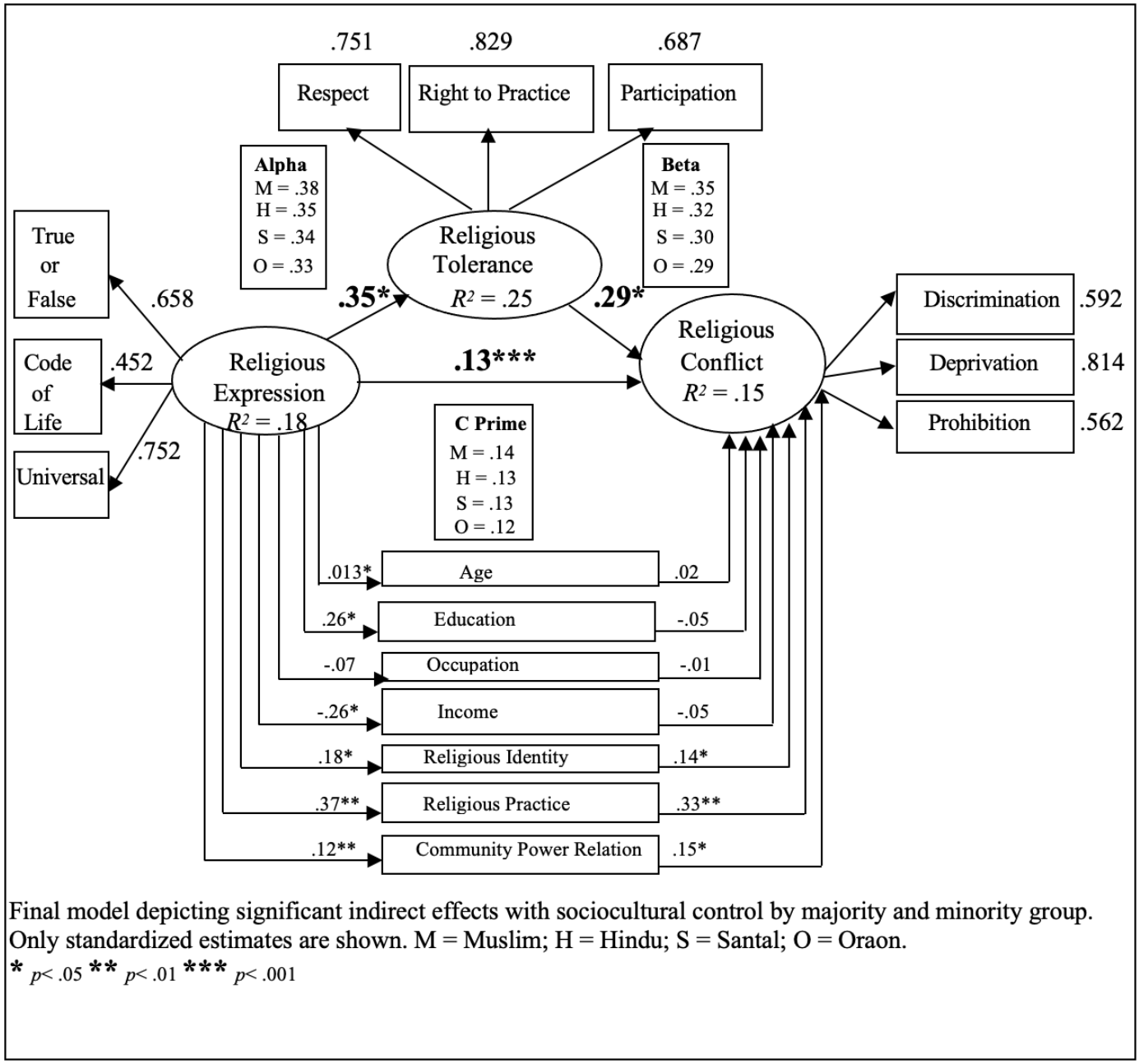
Figure 2. Direct Effects



Note: Final model depicting significant indirect effects by majority and minority group. Only standardized estimates are shown. M = Muslim; H = Hindu; S = Santal; O = Oraon.

* p< .05 ** p< .01 *** p< .001

Figure 3. Indirect and Total Effects



Final model depicting significant indirect effects with sociocultural control by majority and minority group. Only standardized estimates are shown. M = Muslim; H = Hindu; S = Santal; O = Oraon.
* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Figure 4. Mediation: Role of Sociocultural Covariates

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