

DOES GRADUATING FROM MADRASA MAKE IT EASIER TO COPE WITH LIFE'S CHALLENGES? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY WITH MADRASA GRADUATES IN KOSOVO



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Abstract

Alauddin Madrasa has played an important role in Albanian society since its foundation until today. Madrasa graduates have a respectable place in society and as such have always been close to the people in the most difficult days. However, despite the contribution that madrasa graduates make to society, no one has been interested in their welfare. In other words: How do they cope with the challenges of life?

The aim of this paper is to study the religious coping of madrasa graduates. To achieve this goal, a survey was conducted with 300 madrasa graduates. A construct measuring religious coping was adopted from the literature. Data were analysed using SPSS ver. 27. All mean scores obtained as a result of the research show that the level of religious coping of madrasah graduates is high. This indicates that madrasa graduates generally are coping quite well. The madrasa has prepared them well for the life challenges that graduates face. In light of these findings, the paper discusses the impact of studying in a madrasa and the lessons it teaches its graduates.

1. Introduction

Life is full of financial and spiritual difficulties and difficulties. Life, which is full of difficulties, pushes people to struggle to cope with these difficulties. Coping is a form of response to life's adversities and challenges, which is reflected in human behavior. The concept of coping can be explained as behavioral and emotional reactions exhibited in order to control the environmental and internal desires and conflicts and to minimize life tension (Folkman and Lazarus, 1985). The values that people have are an important factor that provides support to people in coping with the difficulties of life. Among these values, religion is seen as the most effective factor in coping with difficulties. Therefore, the institutions in which religious values are acquired and their effects on individuals are worth examining from this perspective.

Religion holds significant influence in the lives of numerous individuals (Ano and Vasconcelles, 2005). Religion offers people a variety of ways, such as prayers, rituals, religious/philosophical

books, and religious ceremonies, to achieve a variety of goals, such as meaning, comfort, intimacy, self-actualization, psychological well-being, and spiritual fulfillment (Tarakeshwar et al., 2003). For Muslims, religion forms the core of their identity, irrespective of their level of religious devotion or affiliation with any particular religious organization (Hassan, 2007). Faith holds great significance in their lives, and even individuals who are not devout practitioners still possess some level of belief and faith. Islam is a comprehensive religion that encompasses all aspects of life, including spiritual, social, economic, political, and familial dimensions. It is viewed as a complete way of life that does not compartmentalize religion from other spheres of existence (Hamdan, 2007).

Religion is taught formally in all education levels. In the high school level, the religious Islamic school is called madrasa. The word "madrasa" comes from the Arabic root "derase" and means "the place where the lectures are held and the building where the student sits and gets lectures" (Hızlı, 1987). In its literal usage in

Arabic, the term "madrasa" refers to any type of school, whether religious or secular, and can be applied to educational institutions ranging from primary schools to universities (Cochrane, 2016).

In Kosovo, the Islamic religious personnel receive their training from two main educational institutions: the Alauddin Secondary School Madrasa, which was established in 1951 and is one of the oldest Islamic religious schools in the country, and the Faculty of Islamic Studies, which is a private institution (Hamiti et al., 2017). The Alauddin Madrasa was named after its founder, Alauddin Bey (Kasumi, 1988). Alauddin Madrasa currently operates as a high school institution providing Islamic education in Kosovo and has been accorded the status of a general high school. Its operations have been overseen by the Ministry of Education-Science and Technology of Kosovo since the year 2000. The institution adheres to the curricula approved by both the Kosovo Ministry of Education and the Presidency of the Islamic Union of Kosovo. The diploma awarded upon completion of studies at the madrasah is considered equivalent to those earned from other high schools (Ahmetaj, 2016).

Regardless of profession or religion, everyone faces difficult times and challenges in life. This paper aims to examine how people who have graduated from the Alauddin Madrasa deal with life's challenges. Specifically, the purpose of this paper is to understand the religious coping of madrasa graduates, as the lessons they take away from the madrasa are used to look at life from a different perspective. In other words, madrasa graduates are expected to have a high level of religious coping.

2. Literature Review

Many people cite religion when asked how they handle their most stressful situations (Pargament et al., 2000). Therefore, it is seen that studies on the role of religion and religious education in coping with the difficulties of life have increased. Two assumptions underlie the study of religious coping. First, it is assumed that all people face difficulties and changes that challenge them beyond their own abilities and trigger a dynamic coping process that can be distinguished from both the triggering event and the consequences of coping. Second, it posits that the person is a proactive agent in coping, having many alternatives and choices and an a priori orienting system (Harrison et al., 2011).

Studies have shown that those who use positive religious coping techniques have less depression, anxiety and worry (Ano and Vasconcellos, 2005). Religious thought is found to be the most important strategy used to cope with illness (Koenig et al., 1992). Many individuals turn to religious coping during times of stress and find it to be a valuable source of support. Religious

communities can provide social support, a sense of purpose and meaning, and a framework for understanding and accepting life events (Pargament, 1997). In contrast, a study by Hebert et al. (2009) found that negative religious coping, i.e., feeling abandoned by or anger at God, predicts worse mental health and life satisfaction in women with breast cancer.

A study on "A Study on the Interaction Between Religious Coping and Hope, Life Satisfaction and Resilience" was conducted by Veysel Uysal et al. (2017). In the study aiming to examine the relationship and interaction between religious coping and hope, life satisfaction and resilience in adults, it was found that life satisfaction, hope level and resilience had a positive and significant relationship with positive religious coping; It was concluded that there is a negative and significant relationship with negative religious coping. (Uysal et al., 2017).

Another study, "Life Events and Religious Coping", was made by Sema Eryücel (2013) as a doctoral thesis. An analysis of the findings of this study indicates that positive and negative forms of religious coping produced significantly different results. In positive and negative religious coping one's image of God, one's perception of an experience as a punishment or as a learning experience, and one's openness to help from other people or the lack thereof, and the degree to which one was happy with one's fellows were all found to be determinative factors. These factors were also found to relate to the degree to which one was pleased with one's life, the effect of life events in positively or negatively affecting the individual, and the increase in or lack of one's awareness. The perspective from which life events were viewed was found to be of the utmost significance in crisis management, more so than the nature of the life events themselves. Negative religious coping was also found to produce insignificant or even negative effects in the resolution process. (Eryücel, 2013).

Neslihan Can, on the other hand, made a study called "An Evaluation on Religious Beliefs and Values That Create Resource To Coping Behavior" in 2019. In the study, as a theoretical research, it was conducted on coping, God, the hereafter, faith in fate, worship and values; and then, the relationship between these beliefs and values and coping behavior was tried to be determined. (Can, 2019).

Also, for an Evaluation of Research on 'Religious Coping', the study titled "An Evaluation of Research on 'Religious Coping' in Türkiye" by Süleyman Abanoz can be viewed. (Abanoz, 2020).

3. Methodology

3.1. Data collection

Data for this study are collected electronically using the survey method. The questionnaire was prepared in Google Forms and the link was shared online. First, we have met with the Chief Imam of Kosovo and we have asked him to help us collecting the data. After that, we have met with the directors of the Madrasa in Prishtina and Prizren. Finally, we have met with the Mufti of Prizren. We have shared the link and have asked these officials to share the link among imams, employees working in Islamic Community of Kosovo. We have also shared the link in Facebook and asked people who have graduated from the madrasa to complete the questionnaire. We also shared the link with imams and people we knew had graduated from the madrasa via Whatsapp and Viber. We first have added a screening question to exclude participants who have not finished a madrasa. A total of 300 completed questionnaires were received. Table 1 shows the demographic data of the sample.

3.2. Measures

Since the aim of this study was to measure the degree of coping with life challenges, we adopted Ayten's (2012) scale. This scale was first developed by Pargament, Koenig, and Perez (2000) and adapted for the Turkish context by Ayten (2012). The Turkish version consists of 9 factors and 33 items. These items are measured on a Likert scale ranging from "1" = I am not happy at all to "5" = I am very happy.

3.3. Statistical Analyses

To analyze the data, we used SPSS ver.27. First, we presented the frequency and percentage distributions for the demographic variables. Then, we provided the mean scores for each item to examine the coping level of the madrasa graduates. Then, we conducted a reliability and validity analysis to examine whether the scale is reliable and valid.

4. Results

In this section, we have provided the results from the survey.

Table 1. Demographic data of sample (n=300)

Variable		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	214	71.3
	Female	86	28.7
Age	20-30	53	17.7
	31-40	124	41.3
	41-50	61	20.3
	Over 50	52	20.7
Marital status	Single	28	9.3
	Married	272	90.7
Education	Graduated from madrasa	50	16.7
	Bachelor's degree	163	54.3
	Master's degree	67	22.3
	Doctorate degree	20	6.7
Graduated madrasa	Alauddin Main Madrasa in Prishtina	144	48.0
	Alauddin Madrasa in Prizren	108	36.0
	Alauddin Madrasa in Gjilan	48	16.0
Graduation year	Before 1980	14	4.7
	1980-1989	47	15.7
	1990-1999	37	12.3
	2000-2009	119	39.7
	2010-2019	77	25.7
	After 2020	6	2.0

Table 1 summarizes the demographic data of the sample. Most of the participants, 71.3%, are male and only 28.7% are female. Most of the participants, 41.3%, are in the age group 31-40 years. 90.7% of the participants are married. 54.3% of the participants have completed undergraduate studies after madrasa. 48% of the

participants graduated from the Madrasa in Prishtina, 36% of them in Prizren and 16% in Gjilan. Of the participants, 39.7% graduated between 2001-2009.

Table 2 provides the descriptive statistics for the Religious Cope Scale, including the minimum value, maximum value, mean, and standard deviation. As can be seen from the table, the mean scores for each statement are quite high. This means that the madrasa graduates are coping well with life's challenges. Except for the

last mean values, all other mean values are above 4. The participants strongly agreed with the statements. Therefore, we can say that madrasa graduates have a high level of religious commitment.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the Religious Cope Scale

	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation
I repent of my sins.	2	5	4.85	0.382
I ask forgiveness from Allah for the bad things I do.	3	5	4.84	0.391
I ask Allah for help to remove my anger and rage.	3	5	4.90	0.318
I try not to commit too many sins.	1	5	4.80	0.479
I try to be closer to Allah.	4	5	4.94	0.244
I pray to Allah not to lead me astray.	4	5	4.94	0.244
I feel that Allah is with me at every moment.	4	5	4.95	0.211
I try to worship.	3	5	4.91	0.303
I say that Allah knows best what is best for me.	4	5	4.96	0.188
I say that the end of sabr is salvation.	4	5	4.95	0.225
I see what happens to me as a test from Allah.	3	5	4.80	0.425
I say, in every evil there is a good.	3	5	4.88	0.339
I think what happens to me will increase my spiritual side more.	3	5	4.65	0.506
I stay away from religious people. (R)	1	5	4.29	0.838
I withdraw from the religious people around me. (R)	1	5	4.43	0.753
I think my fellow believers do not support me. (R)	1	5	4.22	0.850
I pray to Allah that things will be put in order.	2	5	4.79	0.449
I struggle with my feelings without asking Allah for help. (R)	1	5	4.43	1.213
I pray to Allah to solve my problems.	1	5	4.83	0.471
I ask my friends and relatives to pray for me.	1	5	4.63	0.670
I argue with the imams. (R)	2	5	4.16	0.779
I consider my life as part of a great spiritual power.	2	5	4.36	0.625
I give alms.	3	5	4.58	0.558
I am looking for a new way that turns away from what I think is wrong.	1	5	4.37	0.876
I try to create a new life by returning to religion.	1	5	4.39	0.775
May Allah not test anyone with what happened to me.	1	5	3.59	1.586
I wonder if Allah loves me or not.	1	5	3.63	1.702
I believe that Allah has abandoned me. (R)	1	5	4.82	0.562
I am angry with Allah because He does not answer my prayers. (R)	1	5	4.89	0.518
I wonder if I committed a sin to deserve what happened.	1	5	3.27	1.274
I believe that Allah is punishing me. (R)	1	5	3.40	1.349
I hope that Allah will give me another chance after what happened to me.	1	5	3.93	0.987
I pray that Allah will give me a new purpose in life.	1	5	3.87	1.032

Table 3 shows the results of reliability and factor analysis. Out of 33 items, 6 items were removed from the analysis due to their low loadings. Eight factors were extracted from 27 items in the factor analysis. The reliability coefficient Cronbach's alpha is 0.717, which shows that the scale is reliable. KMO test = 0.816 shows that the data set is very good to proceed with factor analysis. The factor structure differs from Ayten (2012). The first factor consists of six items. The first four items are from the Return to Allah factor of Ayten (2012) and the last two items are from the second factor of Ayten, Fatigue to Do Good. Although most of the items are from the Return to Allah factor of Ayten (2012), these items are specifically about feeling the presence of God in

every moment and every situation. Therefore, this factor is referred to as Piety or Taqwa. The second factor consists of three reversed items. These items are grouped under the same factor by Ayten (2012). Therefore, this factor is referred to as Religious Invocation. The third factor consists of four items. These items are grouped under different factors from Ayten's (2012) structure. The first item belongs to the factor Return to Religion. The second item comes from the Spiritual Dissatisfaction factor. The third item is from the Fatigue from Doing Bad factor and the last item is from the Religious Pleading factor. In this study, we labeled this factor as Religious Invocation.

Table 3. Results of reliability and factor analysis

	Component							
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
I feel that Allah is with me at every moment.	0.794							
I try to be closer to Allah.	0.779							
I pray to Allah not to lead me astray.	0.763							
I try to worship.	0.750							
I say that Allah knows best what is best for me.	0.685							
I say that the end of sabr is salvation.	0.532							
I stay away from religious people. (R)		0.859						
I withdraw from the religious people around me. (R)		0.842						
I think my fellow believers do not support me. (R)		0.759						
May Allah not test anyone with what happened to me.			0.809					
I wonder if Allah loves me or not.			0.770					
I wonder if I committed a sin to deserve what happened.			0.589					
I struggle with my feelings without asking Allah for help. (R)			0.534					
I consider my life as part of a great spiritual power.				0.714				
I give alms.				0.642				
I ask my friends and relatives to pray for me.				0.627				
I argue with the imams.(R)				0.532				
I ask forgiveness from Allah for the bad things I do.					0.826			
I repent of my sins.					0.799			
I ask Allah for help to remove my anger and rage.					0.732			
I hope that Allah will give me another chance after what happened to me.						0.850		
I pray that Allah will give me a new purpose in life.						0.838		
I am angry with Allah because He does not answer my prayers. (R)							0.835	
I believe that Allah has abandoned me. (R)							0.753	
I say, in every evil there is a good.								0.761
I see what happens to me as a test from Allah.								0.539
I think what happens to me will increase my spiritual side more.								0.508
KMO					0.816			
Total Explained Variance					67.889			
Cronbach's Alpha for 27 items					0.717			

The fourth factor consists of four items. These items are grouped the same as in the factor of Ayten (2012). This factor is named as Religious Alignment. The fifth factor consists of three items. These three items are from the first factor of Ayten (2012) and are about returning to Allah with repentance. Therefore, this factor is referred to as Return to Allah. The sixth factor consists of two items. These items are the same as in Ayten's (2012) factor Search for a Religious Path. The seventh factor consists of two items identical to Ayten's (2012) Spiritual Dissatisfaction factor. Therefore, this factor is referred to as Spiritual Dissatisfaction. The last factor, the eighth factor, consists of three items. These items come from Ayten's (2012) second factor and refer to having a good attitude towards life events. Therefore, this factor is referred to as Humility.

5. Conclusions

used to capture the coping levels of the graduates, and the findings indicate that the graduates exhibit high levels of religious coping. This finding is important because it highlights the contribution of the madrasa to the lives of the graduates, as it equips them with basic knowledge about religion and life. Moreover, research has shown that individuals who use religious coping strategies have less stress and worry in life.

The high reliability and good validity of the religious coping scale used in this study provides confidence in the accuracy of the

findings. Additionally, the factor analysis revealed eight factors, which could be further explored to better understand the specific dimensions of religious coping among madrasa graduates.

These findings have important implications for the role of religious education in promoting mental health and well-being among individuals. The Alauddin Madrasa, as a traditional Islamic educational institution, offers an alternative source of support for individuals who are experiencing stress and hardship in life. As such, it is recommended that the madrasa continues to provide quality religious education and support for the community.

Furthermore, this study provides a basis for further research on the relationship between religious education and coping strategies in other traditional Islamic institutions. Future studies could explore the role of other factors, such as gender, age, and socioeconomic status, in religious coping among madrasa graduates. Such research could contribute to a better understanding of the factors that influence coping strategies among individuals and inform the development of interventions to promote mental health and well-being.

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