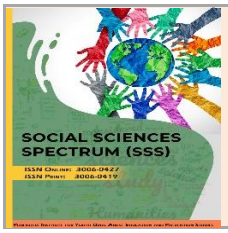

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Personality Traits and Spouse Selection in Young Adults: The Mediating Role of Religiosity

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Abstract

The study investigated the association between personality traits, religiosity, and spouse selection in young adults. This cross-sectional research included 230 participants (men = 113, women = 117) aged 18-35 years (M_{age} = 22.3, SD_{age} = 3.01), recruited in-person using a non-probability convenient sampling strategy. Participants filled out a demographic information sheet and completed English versions of the Ten Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003), Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (Worthington et al., 2003), and Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (Refahi et al., 2010). Data was analyzed using SPSS version 23.00 and Process Macro version 4.2. The findings revealed that process criteria of spouse selection positively correlated with religiosity, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, but showed a negative association with neuroticism. Conversely, the content criteria of spouse selection showed negative associations with religiosity, extraversion, conscientiousness, and agreeableness, while positively correlating with neuroticism and openness to experiences. Furthermore, religiosity, extraversion, and agreeableness predicted both spouse selection criteria, with openness only predicting content criteria. Moreover, all personality traits indirectly influenced both spouse selection criteria through religiosity. This study has implications for academia and marital counseling, offering insights that could guide young adults in making informed and value-aligned marital decisions.

Keywords: Spouse Selection, Religiosity, Personality Traits, Young Adults, Relationships.

Introduction

The selection of a life partner has always been a significant focus within societies (Alavi et al., 2014; Husain & Gulzar, 2015). Certain universal factors, including biological, physical, social, and personal aspects, are consistently prioritized in partner selection (Ktsanes, 1995). Personality traits, as suggested by the literature, might be substantial in influencing spouse selection (Keldal, 2022; Parsaei & Refahi, 2017; Refahi et al., 2010). Recently, researchers have begun to explore links between trait structures and religiosity through the Big Five model (Saroglou, 2010). In Pakistan, marriage is heavily influenced by religion and culture (Husain & Gulzar, 2015). Due to our collectivistic culture, our marriage trends and preferences are unique compared to the West (Husain & Gulzar, 2015; Shehzad, 2017). Furthermore, developing countries are experiencing rapid social changes, with higher educational experiences and employment rates, which might alter expectations for prospective spouses (Movahedi, 2015). In light of these dynamics, it would be interesting to investigate spouse selection from the perspective of one's personality traits and religiosity levels among the dominant group of young adults in Pakistan. The current study aims to deepen our understanding of how individual personality traits, mediated by religiosity, shape martial preferences in Pakistani young adults.

Personality Traits

Personality is considered one of the most significant domains of psychological research, as it serves as a robust predictor of various life outcomes (Azucar et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2007). Personality traits represent shared fundamental characteristics on which individuals differ, and these personality traits are enduring across time and contexts (Diener & Lucas, 2020). Caspi and colleagues (2005) further emphasize the stability of personality traits and their ability to reflect consistent behaviors. Costa and McCrae (2001) assert that personality traits are primarily shaped by human biology rather than life experiences, functioning as continuous distributions rather than specific personality types.

Personality psychologists have sought to provide a unified framework for comprehending the whole individual (McAdams & Pals, 2006). Early works by Gordon Allport and Henry Odbert identified more than 4,000 words to define personality traits. Allport later classified traits in a hierarchy, comprising cardinal, central traits and secondary traits (Niwlikar, 2022). Cattell posited 16 essential personality qualities, cumulating in the development of the widely used 16 Personality Factor Questionnaire (16PF) (Mead & Cattell, 2008; Matz et al., 2016). Eysenck’s model of personality identified three primary dimensions, factors of Introversion, Neuroticism / Stability, and Psychoticism/ Socialization. He argued that biological factors and environmental influences impact these traits (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1993).

Among the various models of personality, the Big Five-Factor Model has emerged as the most well-researched, well-regarded, and widely accepted theoretical framework across cultures and age groups (Gerber et al., 2011; Schacter et al., 2011). McAdams (1992) described it as a conceptually and empirically advanced model in the field of personality psychology.

The five-factor model comprises five major traits i.e. openness to new experiences, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, and neuroticism (McCrae & John, 1992). Each bipolar trait, such as extraversion vs. introversion, encompasses several more specialized components (e.g., talkativeness and outgoingness), which in turn encompasses an array of more particular and comprehensive attributes (Gosling et al., 2003).

Extraversion is characterized by dominance, assertiveness, seeking excitement, enthusiasm, and sociability (Matthews et al., 2003; Wilt & Revelle., 2009). Agreeableness reflects empathy, kindness, prioritization of others' needs, cooperative nature, and ability to go with the flow (Graziano et al., 2009; Matthews et al., 2003). Openness to experience is associated with intellectual curiosity, thoughtfulness, creativity, flexible thinking and imagination, respect for diversity, and impartiality in evaluation (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Digman, 1990; Matthews et al., 2003). Conscientiousness involves self-discipline, responsible attitude, goal-directed conduct, adherence to regulations, and diligence (Matthews et al., 2003; Robert et al., 2009). Finally, neuroticism captures a tendency toward negative emotional states, like anxiousness, hostility, self-consciousness, anger, worry, and sadness, and being socially sensitive (Matthews et al., 2003; McCrae & John., 1992; Widiger, 2009).

Religiosity

Religion holds an essential place in the lives of people across the globe (Diener et al., 2011), especially in regions such as Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia (Hackett et al., 2018). Religiosity, religiousness, religious involvement, and spirituality are often used interchangeably (Holdcroft, 2006). Johnson et al. (2001) describe religiosity as the degree of devotion to a religion, adherence to its teachings, and the expression of this commitment through attitudes and behaviors. Similarly, Hill et al. (2000) highlight that religiosity involves a shared understanding of holy rituals and ceremonies, and morality.

Glock and Stark (1965) conceptualized religiosity as a multidimensional construct, comprising rituals, beliefs, experiences, knowledge, and personal influences of religion on life. Specifically, they proposed five dimensions of religiosity: experiential dimension (one's own religious experience, potentially transcendental), ritualistic dimension (participation in communal worship), ideological dimension (adherence to particular religious' doctrines), intellectual dimension (intellectual knowledge about religion), and consequential dimension (impact of religion on different areas of modern life) (Holdcroft, 2006). Religious orientation, a prominent framework to explore one's association with religion and religious behavior (Hunter & Merill, 2013), distinguishes between extrinsic orientation, defined as using religion for external gains, and intrinsic orientation, where religion is internalized as the guiding principle of life (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Spouse Selection

Marriage is the most frequently occurring, salient social event in human life (Brkljačić et al., 2024; Parsaei & Refahi, 2017; Ryan, 2004). It is the most researched social bond (Umberson & Montez, 2010) and impacts various aspects of life, including physical and mental health, longevity, positivity, and financial comfort (Waite & Lehrer, 2003). It results from spouse selection decisions, an equally important decision (Parsaei et al., 2014), made either by the partners themselves or by their close kin, such as parents, especially in Pakistani families (Buston & Emlen, 2003; Shaw, 2001). Commonly defined as the process of choosing a life partner, it reflects individual preferences for desired characteristics in a relational partner (Abbas & Ferdoos, 2022). These preferences can vary across individuals (Abdullah et al., 2011). Factors influencing the choice of our spouses include personality, family dynamics, society, and culture (Alavi, 2014; Buunk et al., 2009; Chirwa et al., 2022).

Research indicates that desirable characteristics in a spouse include religiousness, kindness, intelligence, and health, as noted in diverse Muslim samples (Badahdah &Tiemann., 2009). Additionally, studies reveal a tendency toward positive assortative mating, where individuals seek

spouses with similar characteristics (Brkljačić et al., 2024; Byrne, 1971; Figueredo et al., 2006). According to literature (Abdullah et al., 2011; Badahdah & Tiemann, 2009; Husain & Gulzar, 2015) and the "structural powerlessness hypothesis" (Buss & Barnes, 1986), women, especially in high power disparity communities, prioritize resourceful men (e.g. education, income). This hypothesis predicts that when women gain equal economic opportunities, this preference diminishes (Kasser & Sharma, 1999).

An individual's own mate value, or the extent to which they demonstrate desirability to the opposite sex, also influences their mating decisions (Buss & Shackelford, 2008; Buston & Emlen, 2003). For instance, men with higher mate value often value physical attractiveness (Arnocky, 2018). Another study argues that high mate value women desire the best combination of qualities in a long-term mate (Buss & Shackelford, 2008). Whereas both men and women, who perceive themselves higher in certain attributes (e.g., wealth, physical appearance, etc.), prefer long-term partners with similar or complementary traits (Buston & Emlen, 2003).

Studies show that men and women choose spouses based on distinct factors and preferences (Buss & Barnes, 1986; Wiederman & Allgeier, 1992). While men emphasize physical attractiveness and sexual desirability (Abdullah et al., 2011; Badahdah & Tiemann, 2009; Buss, 1989; Regan et al., 2008), women prioritize social status in potential partners. However, irrespective of relationship type, young people prefer internal qualities over external ones, e.g. character, education, intelligence, leadership skills, religion, etc. (Chirwa et al., 2022; Maliki, 2009).

Literature Review

A study on a Sudanese, Muslim sample tested the relationship between Big Five traits and religiosity. The findings revealed agreeableness and conscientiousness as positive correlates and predictors (42%) of religiosity, irrespective of gender. Extraversion only correlated with religiosity in men. Men also scored significantly higher on Extraversion (Abdul-Khalek et al., 2023). A similar study in Iran concluded that self-rated religiosity positively correlated with agreeableness and conscientiousness and negatively with the openness dimension (Afhami et al., 2017).

Likewise, another study on the five-factor model of personality traits and self-classified spirituality and religiosity was conducted. The findings showed that religious people had the highest levels of extraversion and the lowest levels of openness, agreeableness, and neuroticism. Spiritual people reported the highest openness, while religious and non-spiritual people had the lowest levels of neuroticism (Lace et al., 2020).

One study investigated the relationship between the Big Five personality traits and life satisfaction, with the mediating role of religiosity. The results of this study established that religiousness positively correlated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion, but negatively with openness. The findings confirmed the significant role of religiosity as a mediator between four Big Five traits (except neuroticism) and life satisfaction (Szcześniak et al., 2019).

Keldal (2022) studied how personality traits were related to young individual's mate-selection processes. The results showed that people with high levels of conscientiousness, and low levels of neuroticism and openness placed value on virginity, religiousness, and political similarity. In contrast, a study in Iran found no association between spouse selection and personality types. The authors emphasized that this lack of association might be attributed to incompatible Western scales or that the family and society might be playing bigger roles than personality types in the Iranian population. Moreover, they highlighted that the financial and educational levels of potential brides were also important interests for grooms' parents. Religion and manners emerged as important characteristics for spouse selection, irrespective of gender (Movahedi, 2015).

Similarly, a study investigated personality factors as predictors of spouse selection criteria. The findings confirmed that personality traits predicted mate selection criteria. The content criteria of spouse selection were negatively predicted by openness, and agreeableness, but positively by neuroticism and conscientiousness. On the other hand, openness, agreeableness, extraversion, and conscientiousness positively predicted process criteria (Parsaei & Refahi, 2017). A similar study, employing the Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (PCSSI) (Refahi et al., 2010), observed that content criteria had a higher mean value than the process criteria. Moreover, emotional instability demonstrated a positive relationship with content criteria, while emotional regression negatively correlated with process dimension. Also, logical love (pragma) was the best predictor of process criteria.

Likewise, a qualitative study by Chirwa and colleagues (2022), with participants from Zambia, presented their findings on mate selection. The themes that emerged indicated socio-economic status (education, financial stability, type of profession), religiosity, physical attributes (height, beauty, body size and hair, complexion, no presence of HIV), internal attributes (e.g., loving, caring, well-disciplined, intelligence, etc.) and social skills as the potential factors important in mate selection.

Similarly, in a local study, Pakistani participants ranked their preference for 10 psychosocial preferences in a potential partner. Men ranked "beautiful" as their top preference whereas women ranked "educated" as their top preference. Gender differences indicated men had a greater preference for beautiful, obedient/homely and frugal while women preferred educated and high-earning potential mates (Husain & Gulzar, 2015). A recent study on working women from Skardu, Pakistan indicated "education" as their top criteria, followed by personal attributes, educational homogamy, family background, kindness, financial stability, social status and societal pressure to marry. Good morals and emotional stability were important criteria, while ethnicity, age, and health were of moderate importance. Physical attractiveness and similar cultural background were, however, unimportant (Abbas & Ferdoos, 2022).

To conclude, individual personality characteristics and religiosity influence interpersonal relationships and life decisions. This interplay becomes crucial in spouse selection, where personal, social, cultural, and religious values converge. In Pakistan, religious values and societal expectations often govern spouse selection alongside one's personality traits. To the best of our knowledge, religiosity, in particular, has not been investigated as a possible mediator that links personality traits and preferences in spouse selection. Furthermore, changing marriage trends and gender differences have also been highlighted in the extant literature (e.g., Uperty, 2024), suggesting unique patterns in spouse selection. These dynamics warrant a deeper investigation to undercover specific associations and predictors of spouse selection in our indigenous context. The hypotheses of this study were as follows:

1. Religiosity would positively correlate with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion but negatively with neuroticism and openness to experience.
2. Religiosity would positively correlate with the process criteria of spouse selection but negatively with the content dimension.
3. Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience would have a positive correlation with the process criteria of spouse selection while neuroticism would have a negative correlation. Neuroticism would positively correlate with the content criteria of spouse selection while extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience would negatively correlate with the content criteria.

4. Religiosity would positively predict the process dimension of spouse selection but negatively predict the content dimension.

Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness, and religiosity would positively predict the process dimension of spouse selection whereas neuroticism would be its negative predictor.

Extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness and religiosity would negatively predict the content dimension of spouse selection whereas neuroticism would positively predict it.

Religiosity would mediate the relationship between personality traits and spouse selection criteria.

There would be significant gender differences across study variables.

Method

For this correlational (cross-sectional) study, a sample of 230 young adults (n = 117 women and n = 113 men) aged 18 to 35 years old (M = 22.3, SD = 3.01), through a non-probability convenient sampling technique. Data was collected in person from students enrolled in universities across Lahore, Pakistan. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutions, and permission was secured from the authors of the scales used in this research. Participants were briefed about the scope and purpose of the study and were assured that their participation was entirely voluntary. No monetary incentives were offered to the recruited participants. The willing participants filled out a written informed consent prior to data collection. Participants completed the sociodemographic information sheet and standardized scales measuring the study variable. Strict confidentiality protocols, aligned with APA standards, were adhered to, ensuring the safety of participant data at every level. The Data was then analyzed using SPSS version 23 and results were generated and reported according to the posited hypotheses

Assessment Measure

Sociodemographic Information Sheet

The willing participants were given a demographic information sheet to obtain their personal information. It included questions about their age, gender, birth order, level of formal education, estimated family income, family system and geographical background.

Ten-Item Personality Inventory (TIPI)

Personality traits were measured through the Ten Item Personality Inventory (Gosling et al., 2003). It is a 10-item scale with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 indicating a significant disagreement, to 7 indicating a strong agreement. This brief instrument consists of 5 subscales: Extraversion (items 1 and 6; $\alpha = .77$), Agreeableness (items 2 and 7; $\alpha = .71$), Conscientiousness (items 3 and 8; $\alpha = .76$), Neuroticism (items 4 and 9; $\alpha = .70$), and Openness to Experience (items 5 and 10; $\alpha = .62$). Five items are reverse coded (2,4,6,8 and 10). The alpha reliability value of this scale was .72 (Gosling et. al, 2003; Nejad et al., 2021).

Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (RCI-10)

Religiosity was measured through the Religious Commitment Inventory-10 (Worthington et al., 2003). It has a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= not true at all to 5= true for me. It consists of two subscales: Intrapersonal Religious Commitment subscale (items 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, and 8; $\alpha = 0.93$); and the Interpersonal Religious Commitment subscale (items 2, 6, 9, and 10; $\alpha = 0.87$). The reliability of the overall scale was .92. Our study utilized the total score in data analysis.

Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (PCSSI)

Spouse selection was measured through the Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (Refahi et al., 2010), validated on the Iranian population. The responses on this scale are documented through a 5-point Likert scale, graded from 1 = very insignificant to 5 = very important. It has two subscales: Process Criteria and Content Criteria. The content subscale contains psychological and personal characteristics (age, education, charm, appearance, income, chastity, health, etc.), while the process subscale contains items about skills and actions that organize family structures (e.g., communication, nobility, personality, love and affection, flexibility, etc.). The reliability of the original version of PCSSI was obtained to be .88 for process criteria and .84 for content criteria (Nejad et al., 2021; Refahi et al., 2010).

Table 1: *Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 230)*

Demographics	***F***	**%**
Gender		
Men	113	49.1
Women	117	50.9
Birth order		
First Born	77	33.5
Middle Born	88	38.3
Last Born	55	23.9
Only Child	10	4.3
Estimated Family Income		
Less than 50,000	42	18.3
50,001-100,000	71	30.9
100,001-500,000	97	42.2
More than 500,000	20	8.7
Family System		
Nuclear	168	73
Joint	62	27
Geographical Background		
Urban	151	65.7
Rural	79	34.3

Note. f = frequency, % = percentage; Participants, on average, were 22.23 years old (SD = 3.00) and had a formal education of 15 years (SD = 1.76).

Results

The reliability analysis showed Cronbach alpha values of .97 for extraversion, .95 for agreeableness, .94 for conscientiousness, .96 for neuroticism, and .97 for openness subscales of TIPI. Moreover, the Cronbach alpha value was .85 for the RCI-10 scale. The reliability values were .94 and .93 for content and process criteria of PCSSI, respectively.

Table 2: *Correlation Matrix (N =230)*

Variables	*M(SD)*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Extraversion	4.62(2.06)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Agreeableness	5.02(1.83)	.24***	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Conscientiousness	5.21(1.80)	.22**	.43***	-	-	-	-	-
4. Neuroticism	3.77(2.00)	.16*	-.28***	-.12	-	-	-	-
5. Openness to experiences	4.46(2.02)	-.21**	-.23***	-.12	.46***	-	-	-
6. Religiosity	34.22(7.76)	.33**	.43***	.42***	-.55***	-.63***	-	-
7. PC-SS	38(9.63)	.30***	.44***	.20**	-.16*	-.11	.33***	-
8. CC-PS	40.40(12.29)	-.32***	-.38***	-.26***	.42***	.49***	-.68***	-.31***

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation, PC-SS = Process Criteria of Spouse Selection, CC-SS = Content Criteria of Spouse Selection, *p < .05; **p < .01 & ***p < .001

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix, indicating the correlation between personality characteristics (agreeableness, conscientiousness, extraversion, neuroticism, and openness to experience), religiosity, and criteria (content, process) of spouse selection. The results indicated significant positive relationships of religiosity with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion. In contrast, significant negative correlation values of religiosity were observed with neuroticism and openness to experience. Furthermore, religiosity was negatively associated with the content criteria of spouse selection (CC-SS), but positively with the process criteria of spouse selection (PC-SS). Also, PC-SS had positive significant associations with extraversion, agreeableness, and consciousness. However, PC-SS showed non-significant relationships with neuroticism and openness to experience. Lastly, CC-SS demonstrated positive associations with neuroticism and openness to experience but negative associations with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion.

Next, mediation analysis was carried out, using Model 4 of Process Macro version 4.2. Since there were two dependent variables (CC-SS, and PC-SS), the mediating role of religiosity was separately analyzed for each dependent variable.

Table 3: *Mediating Role of Religiosity between Personality Traits and Content Criteria of Spouse Selection (N = 230)*

Relationship	B	SE	*t* (229)	*p*	CI		R^2
					LL	UL	
Extraversion-> Religiosity (a)	1.23	.24	5.21	.01***	.77	1.70	.1065
Extraversion-> Content Criteria(c')	-.64	.30	-2.09	.038*	-1.24	-.04	.4740
Religiosity -> Content Criteria (b)	-1.02	.08	-12.69	.01***	-1.18	-.87	
Total Effect (c)	-1.90	.36	-5.06	.01***	-2.64	-1.16	.1008

Indirect Effect (a x b)	-1.26	.27			-1.81	-.75	
Agreeableness-> Religiosity (a)	1.82	.25	7.14	.01***	1.32	2.32	.1828
Agreeableness-> Content Criteria (c')	-.72	.36	-1.10	.047*	-1.42	-.01	.4732
Religiosity -> Content Criteria (b)	-1.01	.08	-11.93	.01***	-1.17	-.84	
Total Effect (c)	-2.55	.41	-6.17	.01***	-3.36	-1.73	.1431
Indirect Effect (a x b)	-1.83	.32			-2.47	-1.21	
Conscientiousness-> Religiosity (a)	1.82	.26	7.02	.01***	1.30	2.32	.1775
Conscientiousness-> Content Criteria (c')	.23	.37	.62	.53	-.49	.95	.4648
Religiosity -> Content Criteria (b)	-1.10	.09	-12.98	.01***	-1.27	-.93	
Total Effect (c)	-1.77	.44	-4.06	.01***	-2.63	-.91	.0674
Indirect Effect (a x b)	-2.00	.33			-2.65	-1.36	
Neuroticism-> Religiosity (a)	-2.14	.21	-10.03	.01***	-2.56	-1.72	.3063
Neuroticism-> Content Criteria (c')	.39	.36	1.11	.271	-.31	1.10	.4668
Religiosity -> Content Criteria (b)	-1.02	.09	-11.09	.01***	-1.20	-.84	
Total Effect (c)	2.58	.37	7.02	.01***	1.86	3.31	.1777
Indirect Effect (a x b)	2.19	.29			1.67	2.80	
Openness -> Religiosity (a)	-2.42	.20	-12.32	.01***	-2.81	-2.04	.3396
Openness-> Content Criteria (c')	.66	.38	1.81	.07	-.06	1.43	.4715
Religiosity -> Content Criteria (b)	-.97	.10	-9.79	.01***	-1.16	-.77	
Total Effect (c)	3.03	.35	8.68	.01***	2.34	3.71	.2482

Indirect Effect (a x b)	2.34	.25		1.85	2.83

Note. B = Beta Coefficient, CI= Confidence Interval; LL= Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit; R2= R Square, *p<.05; **p<.01; **p<.001

Foremost, the mediating role of religiosity between individual personality traits and CC-SS was observed (Table 3). The analysis revealed that extraversion positively predicted (10.65%) religiosity (a-path analysis) in young adults (B = 1.23, t (229) = 5.21, p < .05). Path-b analysis revealed religiosity had a significant negative effect on the CC-SS (B = -1.02, t (229) = -12.69, p < .05). The indirect effect of extraversion on CC-SS through religiosity was significant as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = -1.26, SE = .27, Boot CI ranging from -1.81 to -.75 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. Moreover, extraversion had a significant direct negative impact on CC-SS, after controlling the mediating role of religiosity (c'-path) (B = -.64, t (229) = -2.09, p < .05). Both extraversion and religiosity accounted for 47.40% variance in CC-SS. Since the indirect effect was significant, it supports that religiosity mediated the relationship between extraversion and CC-SS. To conclude, extraversion influences religiosity, which in turn, reduces the preference for CC when choosing a spouse.

Next, agreeableness positively predicted (18.28%) religiosity (a-path analysis) in our sample (B = 1.82, t (229) = 7.14, p < .05). Path-b analysis revealed religiosity had a significant negative effect on the CC-SS (B = -1.01, t (229) = -11.93, p < .05). The indirect effect of agreeableness on CC-SS through religiosity (mediator) was significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = -1.83, SE = .32, Boot CI ranging from -2.47 to -1.21 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. This suggests that agreeableness positively impacts religiosity, which reduces the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. Moreover, agreeableness had a significant direct negative impact on CC-SS (c'-path) (B = -.72, t (229) = -1.10, p < .05). Both agreeableness and religiosity accounted for 47.32% variance in CC-SS.

Conscientiousness also positively predicted (17.75%) religiosity (a-path analysis) (B = 1.82, t (229) = 7.02, p < .05). Path-b analysis revealed religiosity had a significant negative effect on CC-SS (B = -1.10, t (229) = -12.98, p < .05). The indirect effect of conscientiousness on the CC-SS through religiosity (mediator) was significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = -2.00, SE = .33, Boot CI ranging from -2.65 to -1.36 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. This demonstrates that conscientiousness positively impacts religiosity, which reduces the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. However, conscientiousness had a non-significant direct impact on CC-SS (c'-path) (B = .23, t (229) = .62, p > .05).

However, neuroticism negatively predicted (30.63%) religiosity (a-path analysis) in our sample (B = -2.14, t (229) = -10.03, p < .05). Path-b analysis revealed religiosity had a significant negative effect on the CC-SS (B = -1.02, t (229) = -11.09, p < .05). The indirect effect of neuroticism on CC-SS through religiosity (mediator) was significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = 2.19, SE = .29, Boot CI ranging from 1.67 to 2.80 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. This demonstrates that high neuroticism negatively influences religiosity, which, in turn, is associated with increased emphasis on CC in spouse selection. However, neuroticism had a non-significant direct impact on CC-SS (c'-path) (B = .39, t (229) = 1.11, p > .05).

Lastly, openness to experience negatively predicted (39.96%) religiosity (a-path analysis) (B = -2.42, t (229) = -12.32, p < .05). Path-b analysis revealed religiosity had a significant negative effect on the CC-SS (B = -.97, t (229) = -9.79, p < .05). The indirect impact of openness on CC-SS through religiosity (mediator) was significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = 2.34, SE = .25, Boot CI ranging from 1.85 to 2.83 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. This

demonstrates that high openness negatively influences religiosity, which, in turn, is associated with increased emphasis on CC in spouse selection. However, openness had a non-significant direct impact on CC-SS (c'-path) (B = .66, t (229) = 1.81, p > .05).

Table 4: *Mediating Role of Religiosity between Personality Traits and Process Criteria of Spouse Selection (N = 230)*

Relationship	**B**	**SE**	***t* (229)**	***p***	**CI**		R^2
					LL	UL	
Extraversion-> Religiosity (a)	1.23	.24	5.21	.01***	.77	1.70	.1065
Extraversion->Process Criteria (c')	1.02	.30	3.36	.01***	.42	1.62	.1496
Religiosity -> Process Criteria (b)	.32	.08	3.96	.01***	.16	.48	
Total Effect (c)	1.41	.30	4.77	.01***	.83	1.99	.0909
Indirect Effect (a x b)	.39	.16			.13	.76	
Agreeableness-> Religiosity (a)	1.82	.25	7.14	.01***	1.32	2.32	.1828
Agreeableness- >Process Criteria (c')	1.93	.34	5.62	.01***	1.25	2.60	.2163
Religiosity -> Process Criteria (b)	.21	.08	2.63	.009**	.054	.37	
Total Effect (c)	2.3	.31	7.37	.01***	1.69	2.93	.1923
Indirect Effect (a x b)	.39	.20			.03	.83	
Conscientiousness-> Religiosity (a)	1.81	.26	7.02	.01***	1.30	2.32	.1775
Conscientiousness-> Process Criteria (c')	.41	.39	1.11	.27	-.32	1.14	.1120
Religiosity -> Process Criteria (b)	.37	.09	4.28	.01***	.20	.53	
Total Effect (c)	1.07	.35	3.10	.002**	.39	1.76	.0404
Indirect Effect (a x b)	.66	.19			.31	1.06	
Neuroticism-> Religiosity (a)	-2.14	.21	-10.03	.01***	-2.57	-1.72	.3063

Neuroticism-> Process Criteria (c')	.18	.36	.50	.62	-.53	.89	.1082
Religiosity -> Process Criteria (b)	.43	.09	4.63	.01***	.25	.62	
Total Effect (c)	-.75	.31	-2.37	.02*	-1.36	-.13	.0241
Indirect Effect (a x b)	-.93	.24			-1.42	-.47	
Openness -> Religiosity (a)	-2.42	.20	12.32	.01***	-2.81	-2.04	.3996
Openness-> Process Criteria (c')	.76	.38	2.00	.046*	.01	1.52	.1227
Religiosity -> Process Criteria (b)	.53	.10	5.35	.01***	.34	.73	
Total Effect (c)	-.53	.31	-1.68	.09	-1.14	.09	.0122
Indirect Effect (a x b)	-1.29	.27			-1.84	-.79	

Note. B = Beta Coefficient, CI= Confidence Interval; LL: Lower Limit; UL= Upper Limit; R2= R Square, *p<.05; **p<.01; **p<.001

In the next step, mediation analysis was performed to visualize religiosity as a mediator between personality traits and process criteria of spouse selection (Table 4). Path-b analysis revealed religiosity had a significant positive effect on the PC-SS (B = .32, t (229) = 3.96, p < .05). The indirect effect of extraversion on the PC-SS through the mediator (religiosity) was significant as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = .39, SE = .1, Boot CI ranging from .13 to .76 at 95% CI) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. To conclude, high extraversion positively influences religiosity, which in turn, increases the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. Moreover, extraversion had a significant direct positive impact on PC-SS (c'-path) (B = 1.02, t (229) = 3.36, p < .05). Both extraversion and religiosity accounted for 14.96% of the variance in PC-SS.

In the case of agreeableness, its indirect effect on PC-SS through the mediator (religiosity) was significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = .39, SE = .20, Boot CI ranging from .03 to .83 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. This demonstrates that high agreeableness positively influences religiosity, which then increases the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. Moreover, agreeableness had a significant direct positive impact on PC-SS (c'-path) (B = 1.93, t (229) = 5.62, p < .05). Path-b analysis showed the significant positive effect of religiosity on the PC-SS (B = .21, t (229) = 2.63, p < .05). Also, the combination of extraversion and religiosity accounted for 21.63% of the variance in PC-SS.

The indirect effect of conscientiousness on PC-SS through the mediator (religiosity) was also significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = .66, SE = .19, Boot CI ranging from .31 to 1.06 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. We conclude that high conscientiousness positively influences religiosity, which in turn, increases the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. However, no direct effect of conscientiousness on PC-SS was observed (c'-path) (B = .41, t (229) = 1.11, p > .05). Path-b analysis demonstrated a significant positive effect of religiosity on the PC-SS (B = .37, t (229) = 4.28, p < .05).

Similarly, the indirect effect of neuroticism on PC-SS through the mediator (religiosity) was significant, as indicated by the non-zero CI indices (B = -.93, SE = .24, Boot CI ranging from -1.42 to -.47 at 95% CI) based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. This indicates that high neuroticism negatively influences religiosity, and low religiosity then reduces the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. Moreover, no direct effect of neuroticism on PC-SS was observed (c'-path) (B = .18, t (229) = .50, p > .05). Path-b analysis demonstrated a significant positive effect of religiosity on the PC-SS (B = .43, t (229) = 4.63, p < .05).

Lastly, religiosity acted as a mediator between openness and PC-SS, as the indirect effect of openness on PC-SS was significant (B = -1.29, SE = .27, Boot CI ranging from -1.84 to -.79 at 95% CI), based on 5,000 bootstrap samples. We infer that high openness negatively influences religiosity, and low religiosity then reduces the preference for CC when choosing a spouse. Moreover, a direct effect of openness on PC-SS was observed (c'-path) (B = .76, t (229) = 2.00, p < .05). Path-b analysis demonstrated a significant positive effect of religiosity on the PC-SS (B = .43, t (229) = 4.63, p < .05).

Table 5: *Gender Differences across Study Variables (N = 230)*

Variables	**Men n=113**	**Women n=117**	**t (228)**	**Cohen's *d***
	M(SD)	***M(SD)***		
Extraversion	4.93(1.89)	4.33(2.17)	2.27*	0.29
Agreeableness	4.93(1.76)	5.10(1.89)	-.72	0.09
Conscientiousness	5.19(1.74)	5.23(1.86)	-.19	0.02
Neuroticism	4.01(1.98)	3.54(2.01)	1.81	0.24
Openness to experience	4.80(1.85)	4.14(2.13)	2.52*	0.33
Religiosity	34.13(6.78)	34.29(8.63)	-.15	0.02
Process Criteria for Spouse Selection	38.56(8.60)	37.47(10.53)	-.86	0.11
Content Criteria for Spouse Selection	40.16(12.19)	40.64(12.43)	-.30	0.04

Note: M = Mean, SD = Standard Deviation; n=sample size, ***p< .001, **p<.01, *p<.05

Table 5 shows the results of the Independent Sample t-test employed to measure gender differences across the study variables. Significant gender differences among personality traits were observed only for openness to experience (t (228) = 2.52, p <.05) and extraversion (t (228) = -2.27, p <.05), with men scoring higher on both traits. Furthermore, the effect sizes were small for both extraversion (d = .29) and openness (d =.33). However, non-significant gender differences were observed for other study variables.

Discussion

Topics of partner selection and marriage decisions have gained the interest of researchers in societies experiencing rapid changes (Khalid & Hassan, 2019). This current cross-sectional study examined how personality traits and religiosity affect young adults' criteria for spouse selection

within our indigenous context. Our study also investigated the relationship between personality traits, religion, and spouse selection, with religiosity tested as a mediator in this relationship.

Foremost, the reliability indices of scales employed in this research were established. Specifically, our study utilized the Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (Refahi et al., 2010), validated on the indigenous population of Iran. Cronbach alpha values of all the employed scales (and their subscales) ranged from .80 to .90 indicating very good reliability (Nunnally, 1978; Hulin et al., 2001), confirming their appropriateness for our cultural context.

The study demonstrated that religiosity positively correlated with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion while showing negative associations with neuroticism and openness to experience, supporting our first hypothesis. Our findings align with previous studies (Abdul-Khalek et al., 2023; Afhami et al., 2017; Schmitt & Fuller, 2015; Schnell, 2012; Saucier & Skrzypinska, 2006; Szcześniak et al., 2019). These personality-religiosity associations appeared more pronounced in collectivistic cultures (Baranski et al., 2024), again supporting the findings of the current study within our collectivistic culture.

Likewise, our second and fourth hypotheses were also accepted as religiosity positively correlated with and predicted the process criteria of spouse selection but had a negative association and prediction for the content criteria. Similarly, extant scholarship suggests that young people prefer internal attributes, especially for long-term relationships (Badahdah & Tiemann, 2009; Chirwa et al., 2022; Maliki, 2009; Movahedi, 2015; Regan et al., 2008). Moreover, studies support the negative association between religiosity and materialism (Ilter et al., 2017; Masoom & Sarkar, 2017). This indicates that people high on religiosity are more likely to focus less on the materialistic and apparent attributes (e.g., charm, income, etc.) of potential spouses.

Our study also found that process criteria of spouse selection positively correlated with extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness, but negatively with neuroticism. However, no association was found between process criteria and openness. Conversely, content criteria positively correlated with neuroticism and openness to experiences but negatively with agreeableness, conscientiousness, and extraversion. Therefore, our third hypothesis was largely supported by our findings. In a similar vein, personality and spouse selection have been related in the past (Keldal, 2022; Parsaei & Refahi, 2017). A similar study (Parsaei & Refahi, 2017), employing TIPI and PCSSI scales, also used in our study, supports our findings. However, the authors found positive links between process criteria and openness, and between content criteria and conscientiousness, which do not align with our study. However, Refahi et al. (2010) observed a positive relationship between emotional instability and content criteria, supporting our findings.

Interestingly, while extraversion and agreeableness predicted both criteria of spouse selection, openness uniquely predicted process criteria only. No direct effect of conscientiousness, neuroticism, and openness was observed on the content criteria of spouse selection, while conscientiousness and neuroticism also did not directly impact the process criteria. These findings provide evidence that our fourth and fifth hypotheses were partially accepted. However, religiosity mediated these relationships, supporting our sixth hypothesis. The mediating role of religiosity was observed across all mediation analyses, underscoring the critical role of religiosity in connecting personality factors and spousal preferences. Personality-religiosity relationships have been documented to amplify in collectivistic cultures (Baranski et al., 2024). We can reason that religion, predominately visible in our collectivistic culture (Burki & Ziring, 2025; Soomro & Memon, 2010), influences the relationship between personality traits and marital preferences. A

similar study in Iran found no direct association between personality and spouse selection, again hinting at the exploration of other variables.

Our study also observed gender variations in extraversion and openness to experiences, with men scoring higher on both, partially supporting the eighth hypothesis. While men have been found to score higher on openness in previous research, Bunnett (2020), however, noted that gender differences across personality traits are consistently small cross-culturally. For extraversion, results often show inconsistency due to the trait's underlying aspects and variation in measuring tools. Women tend to score higher on enthusiasm while men score higher on the assertiveness aspect of extraversion (Bunnett, 2020; Costa et al., 2001). Using the brief TIPI scale did not capture these nuanced aspects. Future studies could employ a facet-level instrument to assess gender differences in personality factors more comprehensively.

Interestingly, no gender differences were found in the context of spouse selection criteria. This may reflect shifting gender norms and martial trends, with a growing emphasis on egalitarian partnerships (Pessin, 2017; Schwartz & Han, 2015). Unlike previous literature that suggests otherwise (Abdullah et al., 2011; Badahdah & Tiemann, 2009; Buss, 1989; Husain & Gulzar, 2015), recent literature indicates that both men and women increasingly prefer similar characteristics in a spouse, such as religion, education, manners, etc. (Badahdah & Tiemann, 2009; Chirwa et al., 2022; Maliki, 2009; Movahedi, 2015).

Conclusions and Implications

The findings of this study largely supported the posited hypotheses, establishing the indirect impact of personality factors on spouse selection through religiosity. Our results highlighted that individuals high in extraversion, agreeableness, and conscientiousness report higher religiosity, leading to a preference for a spouse based on process criteria (religious commitment, decision-making skills, etc.). Whereas individuals high in neuroticism and openness to experience exhibit low religiosity, which is associated with a high preference for content criteria (e.g., beauty, income, job, and charm). By bridging individual characteristics with the socio-cultural construct of religiosity in predicting spouse criteria, this study provides a valuable foundation for understanding the role of religiosity in marital decision-making. Additionally, no gender differences were observed in spouse selection, providing another invaluable insight.

The findings offer indigenous empirical evidence for the growing body of literature on the interaction of personality and religiosity in collectivistic cultures, emphasizing how religiosity-personality interaction shapes marital preferences. Our findings provide implications not only for academic inquiry but could also inform marital and family counseling, where understanding the dynamics of religiosity and personality can guide intentional and value-aligned marital decisions among young adults.

Limitations and Suggestions

Some limitations of this study must be considered. Except for the Preference Criteria of Spouse Selection Inventory (Refahi et al., 2010), developed for Iranian people, the remaining scales were Western, which is why future studies can use indigenously developed instruments for better contextualization and validity of the findings. Another limitation is the use of self-reported measures, as responses, especially those related to religiosity, may be influenced by social desirability bias in our religion-oriented culture. Longitudinal studies are recommended, as mate preferences and religious beliefs/behaviors may change over time (Major-Smith et al., 2023; Zhan et al., 2016). The sample was collected from universities in Lahore, Pakistan, limiting the study's external validity. Future studies should include diverse demographics to improve generalizability

and explore potential group differences. Moreover, variables like age, education levels, relationship status, and familial attributes could be analyzed as mediators in future studies.

Conflict of Interest

The authors showed no conflict of interest.

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