



The Impact of Religious Coping on Jealousy among University Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the impact of religious coping on jealousy among university students in Islamabad, Pakistan. Jealousy is a complex emotional response characterized by resentment, anger, and shame, typically triggered by perceived threats to relationships or social standing. Although religion serves as a significant source of emotional guidance in Pakistani society, empirical research on how religious coping specifically relates to jealousy remains scarce. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students enrolled at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML). Jealousy and religious coping were assessed using the Academic Jealousy Scale and the Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE), respectively. Pearson correlation analysis revealed that negative religious coping was significantly and positively correlated with jealousy ($r = .31, p < .01$), whereas positive religious coping showed a weak and non-significant association. Multiple regression analysis further indicated that negative religious coping significantly predicted jealousy ($\beta = .29, p < .01$), accounting for 11% of the variance. An independent-samples t-test revealed no significant gender difference in jealousy. These findings suggest that students who engage in maladaptive religious coping strategies such as feeling punished by God, experiencing spiritual discontent, or questioning divine love may be more prone to jealousy in academic and social contexts. The study contributes to the limited literature on jealousy and religion by demonstrating the dual nature of religious coping and highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions that promote adaptive faith-based coping strategies. The findings have implications for mental health professionals, educators, and community leaders seeking to foster emotional resilience among young adults in Muslim-majority contexts.

Keywords: religious coping, negative religious coping, jealousy, academic jealousy, university students, emotional regulation, Pakistan

Introduction

Jealousy is a negative emotional state characterized by resentment, anger, and shame, typically triggered by feelings of inferiority or perceived threats in social comparison, especially when one's own value or status is perceived to be in jeopardy (Tian, 2025). The term, derived from the Latin *zelus* meaning “powerful passion and effort,” is closely intertwined with mistrust, anxiety, anger,

and fear of loss. According to ScienceDirect Topics (2025), jealousy is a complex emotional response triggered by a perceived or real threat to a relationship or desired status, with anxiety, anger, and avoidance behaviors frequently co-occurring. In academic settings, jealousy manifests as resentment toward peers who achieve greater success, often impairing interpersonal relationships, academic motivation, and psychological well-being (Koçak, 2019). Among university students, jealousy is particularly prevalent due to the competitive academic environment where social comparison, performance evaluation, and peer relationships are central to daily life. Research has identified three primary types of jealousy: reactive jealousy (responding to actual threats), anxious jealousy (characterized by chronic worry and distrust), and possessive or preventive jealousy (attempting to control situations to avoid loss) (Koçak, 2019). In academic contexts, these forms of jealousy can lead to destructive behaviors such as sabotaging peers, withholding information, or engaging in hostile competition, all of which undermine the collaborative ethos of higher education and contribute to increased stress and diminished mental health. Attachment theory provides a foundational framework for understanding jealousy. According to this perspective, individuals with anxious attachment styles characterized by insecurity, fear of rejection, and low self-esteem are more likely to exhibit intense jealous reactions when relational threats are perceived (Bowlby, 1982; Mikulincer et al., 2007). Recent research has confirmed that attachment anxiety predicts romantic jealousy across cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions (Attridge et al., 2023). Furthermore, poor self-differentiation the inability to distinguish between emotional and rational thinking exacerbates both anxiety and jealousy among individuals with insecure attachment (Deng et al., 2023). The cognitive components of jealousy are closely linked to avoidance behaviors and attachment insecurity, with anxious individuals demonstrating hyper-reactivity to relational danger and poor emotional differentiation (Sharpsteen et al., 1997). Religion, as a fundamental coping resource, has long influenced how individuals manage and regulate their emotions, particularly intense emotions such as jealousy. In many cultures, especially in Muslim-majority societies like Pakistan, religion serves not merely as a set of beliefs but as a practical guide for daily living, offering both spiritual and practical tools to navigate emotional imbalance and psychological stress (Ano and Vasconcelles, 2005; Pargament, 2013). Religious teachings frequently emphasize virtues such as gratitude, contentment, patience (Sabr), and trust in God (Tawakkul), which may serve as protective factors against jealousy by encouraging individuals to accept their circumstances and trust in divine wisdom rather than comparing themselves unfavorably to others. Religious coping, defined as the use of religious practices, beliefs, or community support to deal with stress and emotional distress, has been identified as one of the most prevalent coping mechanisms during times of crisis (Peres et al., 2007). Pargament et al. (2000) distinguish between positive religious coping which includes seeking spiritual support, benevolent religious reappraisal, and collaborative religious problem-solving and negative religious coping, characterized by spiritual discontent, feeling abandoned or punished by God, and questioning divine love. Positive religious coping has been associated with lower levels of psychological distress, whereas negative religious coping is consistently linked to poorer mental health outcomes (Pargament et al., 1998; Koenig et al., 2012). Dolcos et al. (2021) further demonstrated that religious coping strategies are positively correlated with coping self-efficacy and cognitive reappraisal, both essential for regulating negative emotions such as jealousy. Despite the theoretical relevance of religious coping to jealousy, empirical research specifically examining this relationship remains notably scarce. Most studies on religious coping have focused on broad psychological outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and general well-being, while jealousy has received comparatively limited attention (Aggarwal et al., 2023; Areba et al., 2018). Fayyaz and Jafari (2023), in an experimental study in Iran, found that Islamic couple

therapy successfully reduced marital envy while simultaneously improving psychological well-being. However, this study was limited to married couples and did not examine academic jealousy or the broader population of university students. Similarly, research on jealousy and attachment has proliferated, yet the mediating or moderating role of religious coping in this relationship remains largely unexplored. In Pakistani society, where religion is deeply woven into cultural identity, moral values, and daily social interactions, religious coping represents an accessible and culturally acceptable resource for emotional regulation. Pakistani youth frequently encounter academic pressures, social comparisons, and career uncertainties during their university years, circumstances that may trigger jealous responses. Understanding how religious coping relates to jealousy in this context is therefore both theoretically important and practically relevant. The present study draws on Pargament's Theory of Religious Coping (1997) and Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) to examine how positive and negative religious coping strategies relate to jealousy. The study tests the hypotheses that (1) there is a significant relationship between positive and negative religious coping and jealousy, (2) negative religious coping significantly predicts jealousy, and (3) there are no significant gender differences in jealousy among university students.

Materials and Methods

Participants

A total of 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students (55.5% male, $n = 111$; 44.5% female, $n = 89$) currently enrolled at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamabad, participated in the study. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 30 years, with the majority (79.5%, $n = 159$) between 23 and 26 years of age. Most participants were from middle-class socioeconomic backgrounds (87.5%, $n = 175$). Students were recruited using purposive sampling, with inclusion criteria requiring participants to identify with a particular religious belief tradition, be currently enrolled at NUML, and provide informed consent.

Instruments

Demographic Sheet. A brief demographic questionnaire gathered information about participants' age, gender, level of education, family system, living situation, and socioeconomic status.

Academic Jealousy Scale. The Academic Jealousy Scale, developed by Koçak (2019), was used to measure jealousy experienced in academic settings among university students. The scale comprises 19 items scored on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5), with higher scores indicating greater academic jealousy. In its original validation study, the scale demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha = .89, and has been applied across diverse cultural contexts with good cross-cultural validity and reliability (Koçak, 2019). In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .78.

Brief Religious Coping Scale (Brief RCOPE). The Brief RCOPE, developed by Pargament et al. (1998), is a 14-item measure assessing both positive religious coping (e.g., seeking spiritual support, benevolent religious reappraisal) and negative religious coping (e.g., spiritual discontent, punishing God reappraisals). Items are rated on a 4-point Likert scale from not at all (1) to a great deal (4). The scale has demonstrated strong psychometric properties, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .82 to .90 across various studies (Abu-Raiya et al., 2020), and has been extensively validated in Western and non-Western populations. In the present study, Cronbach's alpha was .81 for positive religious coping and .74 for negative religious coping.

Procedure

Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at NUML, Islamabad. Data were collected through an online survey-based questionnaire using Google Forms. Form links were distributed via social media platforms, personal email addresses, and WhatsApp groups. All questionnaires were completed anonymously, and no identifying information was collected. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were informed they could withdraw at any stage without adverse consequences.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using SPSS version 28. Descriptive statistics summarized demographic characteristics and jealousy levels. Pearson product-moment correlation examined relationships between religious coping and jealousy. Linear regression determined the predictive role of religious coping subscales on jealousy. Independent-samples t-tests examined gender differences. Normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis values. Statistical significance was set at $p < .05$.

Results

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables. The Academic Jealousy Scale demonstrated acceptable internal consistency ($\alpha = .78$). The skewness and kurtosis values fell within acceptable ranges (± 1), supporting the assumption of normality. The mean jealousy score was 56.69 (SD = 11.62), indicating moderate levels of academic jealousy among participants. Negative religious coping had a mean of 13.81 (SD = 3.76), while positive religious coping had a mean of 12.46 (SD = 4.56).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics and Psychometric Properties of Study Variables (N = 200)

Variable	k	α	M	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Jealousy	19	.78	56.69	11.62	.08	.13
Positive Coping	7	.81	12.46	4.56	-.33	.69
Negative Coping	7	.74	13.81	3.76	-.33	.69

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients. Negative religious coping demonstrated a significant positive correlation with jealousy ($r = .31$, $p < .01$), indicating that students who engaged in maladaptive religious coping strategies reported higher levels of academic jealousy. In contrast, positive religious coping showed a weak and non-significant negative correlation with jealousy ($r = -.04$, $p > .05$). Additionally, jealousy was weakly but significantly correlated with anxiety ($r = .18$, $p < .05$) and moderately correlated with anger ($r = .25$, $p < .01$), suggesting some overlap between jealousy and other negative emotional states.

Table 2*Correlations Among Study Variables (N = 200)*

Variable	1	2	3
1. Jealousy	-		
2. Positive Religious Coping	-.04	-	
3. Negative Religious Coping	.31**	.29**	-

Note. ** $p < .01$.

A multiple regression analysis was performed to examine the predictive role of positive and negative religious coping on jealousy. As shown in Table 3, the regression model was significant and explained 11% of the variance in jealousy ($R^2 = .11$, $F = 12.28$, $p < .001$). Negative religious coping emerged as a significant positive predictor of jealousy ($\beta = .29$, $p < .01$), whereas positive religious coping did not significantly predict jealousy ($\beta = -.06$, $p = .256$). These results indicate that jealousy among university students is primarily associated with negative rather than positive forms of religious coping.

Table 3*Multiple Regression Analysis Predicting Jealousy from Religious Coping Subscales (N = 200)*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p	95% CI
Positive Religious Coping	-0.08	0.07	-.06	-1.14	.256	[-0.22, 0.06]
Negative Religious Coping	0.35	0.10	.29	3.50	.001	[0.15, 0.55]

Note. $R^2 = .11$.

An independent-samples t -test was conducted to examine gender differences in jealousy. The results revealed no significant difference between male students ($M = 56.38$, $SD = 10.59$) and female students ($M = 57.06$, $SD = 12.84$), $t(197) = -0.41$, $p = .68$, with a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = -.06$). These findings suggest that academic jealousy is experienced similarly by male and female university students in this sample, indicating that interventions targeting jealousy may be effectively designed as gender-inclusive programs.

Table 4*Independent-Samples t -Test for Gender Difference in Jealousy (N = 200)*

Variable	Male M (SD)	Female M (SD)	t	df	p	Cohen's d
Jealousy	56.38 (10.59)	57.06 (12.84)	-0.41	197	.68	-.06

Discussion

The present study investigated the relationship between religious coping and jealousy among university students in Islamabad, Pakistan. Drawing on a quantitative cross-sectional design with 200 participants, the findings provide empirical evidence that negative religious coping is significantly associated with increased jealousy, whereas positive religious coping does not appear to offer significant protection against this emotion in the current sample. Consistent with Hypothesis 1, the correlation analysis revealed a significant positive relationship between negative religious coping and jealousy ($r = .31, p < .01$). Students who reported higher engagement in maladaptive religious coping strategies such as feeling punished by God for their lack of devotion, wondering whether God had abandoned them, or questioning divine love also reported greater levels of academic jealousy. This finding is theoretically meaningful because it situates jealousy within the broader framework of spiritual struggle. When students interpret academic setbacks or peer success through the lens of divine punishment or abandonment, they may develop resentful comparisons with others, fostering jealousy rather than contentment.

The regression analysis provided further support for Hypothesis 2, demonstrating that negative religious coping significantly predicted jealousy ($\beta = .29, p < .01$), accounting for 11% of the variance. Although the explained variance is modest, it represents a meaningful contribution of negative religious coping to the experience of jealousy. This predictive relationship suggests that maladaptive religious appraisals may function as a cognitive distortion that intensifies jealous responses. For instance, a student who performs poorly on an examination and interprets this outcome as evidence of divine displeasure may simultaneously resent peers who performed well, perceiving their success as divine favoritism. Such interpretations transform natural social comparison into spiritually justified resentment.

The non-significant association between positive religious coping and jealousy is noteworthy. Practices such as seeking God's love and care, benevolent religious reappraisal, and collaborative religious problem-solving did not significantly attenuate jealousy in this sample. This null finding may reflect several factors. First, the competitive academic environment in which these students operate may be so salient that positive religious coping is insufficient to counteract the strong social comparison processes that drive jealousy. Second, cultural and measurement factors may play a role: the Brief RCOPE was developed and validated primarily in Western Christian populations, and its items may not fully capture the nuances of Islamic coping practices such as Sabr (patience), Tawakkul (trust in God), and Shukr (gratitude), which are central to Pakistani Muslim spirituality. Third, response styles influenced by social desirability may have attenuated the variability in positive coping scores, reducing statistical power to detect significant effects.

The absence of significant gender differences in jealousy (Hypothesis 3) is consistent with the broader pattern observed in the present study and suggests that academic jealousy is experienced similarly by male and female university students in the Pakistani context. This gender neutrality may be attributed to the shared academic pressures, social comparison dynamics, and developmental challenges that characterize university life for both genders. From a practical standpoint, this finding implies that religious coping interventions targeting jealousy do not need to be differentially designed for male and female students. Instead, gender-inclusive psychoeducational programs may be equally effective.

These findings carry important implications for mental health professionals, educators, and community leaders working with Pakistani youth. The results suggest that religious coping, while culturally valued and frequently accessed, is not universally beneficial. When religious coping

takes the form of spiritual struggle, guilt, or punitive interpretations of adversity, it may intensify negative emotions such as jealousy rather than alleviate them. Mental health practitioners should therefore assess religious coping styles during diagnostic intake and clinical encounters, using instruments such as the Brief RCOPE to identify maladaptive patterns. Interventions can then be tailored to help students reframe their religious interpretations in ways that promote emotional resilience for example, encouraging trust in God's wisdom (Tawakkul), gratitude for personal blessings (Shukr), and acceptance of others' success as part of divine decree rather than personal failure.

Several limitations should be noted. The cross-sectional design prevents causal inferences regarding the direction of the relationship between religious coping and jealousy. It is possible that students experiencing high jealousy are more likely to engage in negative religious coping, or that both variables are influenced by a third factor such as neuroticism or insecure attachment. Longitudinal designs are needed to clarify these causal pathways. Additionally, the sample was drawn exclusively from a single university in Islamabad, limiting the generalizability of findings to other regions of Pakistan or to non-student populations. The reliance on self-report measures may introduce social desirability bias, particularly regarding religious practices and emotions like jealousy. Finally, the study did not assess attachment styles, which have been shown to moderate the relationship between jealousy and emotional outcomes, nor did it include qualitative measures that could illuminate the lived experiences of students using religious coping.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the limited empirical literature on jealousy and religious coping by demonstrating that negative religious coping significantly predicts jealousy among Pakistani university students, whereas positive religious coping does not exhibit significant protective effects. These findings underscore the dual nature of religious coping, highlighting that not all faith-based coping strategies are inherently adaptive. The study emphasizes the need for culturally sensitive, faith-informed interventions that help young adults develop constructive religious coping strategies such as gratitude, patience, and trust in divine wisdom rather than maladaptive patterns characterized by guilt, spiritual discontent, and punitive interpretations. For educators and mental health professionals working in Muslim-majority contexts, understanding the specific ways in which students employ religious coping is essential for designing effective prevention and intervention programs. Future research should employ longitudinal and intervention-based designs, incorporate qualitative methodologies, and explore the mediating roles of attachment styles and cognitive reappraisal to further illuminate the complex relationship between religious coping and jealousy.

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