

Personality as a Determinant of Attitude of People towards *Piri-Muridi* Relationship: Moderating Role of Demographic Variables

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ABSTRACT

Aim of the Study: The practice of Piri-Muridi (Master-Disciple relationship) is widespread in Pakistan, yet it has historically been underexplored by scientific researchers. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the personality attributes that predispose individuals towards Piri-Muridi practices, specifically examining the role of the Big Five personality traits in shaping attitudes towards this relationship.

Methodology: This cross-sectional, quantitative study seeks to determine the predictive role of personality, as measured by the NEO-PI-R, and to explore how demographic variables moderate these relationships. The study utilized the Urdu version of the NEO-PI-R, translated and adapted by Chishti and Kamal (2009), alongside the Piri-Muridi scale developed by Hassan and Kamal (2010). A total of 401 individuals, each holding diverse beliefs about the Piri-Muridi institution, were selected using a snowball sampling technique.

Findings: Key findings indicate that the neuroticism trait accounts for the most significant variance (9.5%) in attitudes towards Piri-Muridi. Additionally, demographic factors such as gender and marital status were found to moderate the relationship between personality traits and attitudes towards Piri-Muridi, while age did not serve as a moderating factor.

Conclusion: These insights have substantial implications for counselors and psychologists, providing valuable knowledge to the psychology of religion and enhancing our understanding of the personality factors influencing spiritual practices.

Keywords: Piri-Muridi (Master-Disciple), Personality Traits, Psychology of Religion.

Introduction

Islam spread widely in the subcontinent, significantly influenced by Sufi spiritual leaders. Sufi traditions emphasized experiential reality and inner transformation over external forms and structures, and they

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were generally open to incorporating new practices (Ahmed, 2008). The Piri-Muridi (master-disciple) relationship is a fundamental aspect of spiritual behavior, deeply rooted in Pakistani society (Bhatti & Kamal, 2020). This practice manifests in two primary stages. The first stage is the populist Sufism prevalent among rural masses, which involves spiritual services, religious ceremonies, and a strong belief in the intercessory powers of saints, often expressed through pilgrimages and veneration at shrines. The second stage is the spiritual bond between the Pir (spiritual guide or holy man) and the Murid (disciple) (Khan, 2015). Religion plays a crucial role in an individual's life, encompassing various multidimensional domains that significantly impact personality. Conversely, an individual's personality traits can influence their religious beliefs and attitudes. Throughout history, philosophers, sociologists, and religious scholars have dedicated efforts to explore these dimensions, adopting various perspectives based on their disciplines. Typically, these scholars have examined religion as an institution, focusing on individuals within specific social or religious contexts. However, the unique religious behavior and attitudes of individuals, along with their personality attributes, are often overlooked. Specifically, in empirical research, there is a noticeable scarcity of studies addressing the interplay between personality and religious beliefs within our cultural context, making it an almost untouched area of study (Hassan & Kamal, 2010).

Among the numerous dimensions of religious behavior, the Piri-Muridi (Master-Disciple) relationship holds significant importance and has deep, entangled roots in our society. The Piri-Muridi relationship illuminates the deeper realities of human existence, emphasizing core values and ultimately guiding all aspects of life in a meaningful direction (Khan, 2015). While phenomenologists, including sociologists and anthropologists, have explored this institution to some extent, the psychological aspects, especially the role of individual predispositions, remain largely unexplored. The Piri-Muridi relationship functions as an institution where religious beliefs and social upbringing profoundly influence and shape an individual's attitudes and beliefs. However, the impact of various personality factors that drive individuals to engage in these practices cannot be overlooked.

Followers of Piri-Muridi hold a deep belief in the blessings bestowed by Sufi shrines, convinced that their lives are guided by the Sufis. They frequently visit these shrines and participate in various rituals, such as offering prayers, reciting the Holy Quran, donating free food, performing Dhamal (a Sufi dance that induces a trance-like state), practicing Chaddar Charhana (a Sufi ritual), receiving Taweez (amulets), tasting salt, and eating sweets (Chaudhary, 2010).

Understanding the Piri-Muridi dynamic requires a comprehensive examination that goes beyond sociocultural contexts to include psychological dimensions. These dimensions include personality traits that might predispose individuals towards such spiritual affiliations. Despite the strong influence of external factors like upbringing and societal norms, intrinsic personality characteristics play a crucial role in determining why some people are drawn to the Piri-Muridi relationship more than others. Exploring these psychological facets is essential for a holistic understanding of the Piri-Muridi phenomenon. Such insights can significantly contribute to the broader field of the psychology of religion, offering valuable perspectives for counselors, psychologists, and scholars interested in the interplay between personality and religious practices.

Daily observations suggest that two individuals with identical religious beliefs can exhibit markedly different behaviors towards the same religious matters. This variance is also evident within the Piri-Muridi (Master-Disciple) institution. A person with strong beliefs and a positive attitude towards Piri-Muridi may significantly differ in personality traits from someone who holds a less positive attitude, even when their general religious beliefs are similar.

The present research endeavors to explore the personality attributes that predispose individuals to engage in Piri-Muridi practices and examines how demographic variables such as age, gender, and marital status moderate the relationship between personality and attitudes towards Piri-Muridi. This research addresses a critical question in the psychology of religion: how does personality shape one's religious and spiritual

behavior? Historically, this question has garnered significant attention from researchers who have investigated it through various personality models. Francis (1992) and others have explored this relationship extensively, and in recent decades, the five-factor model of personality has become a predominant framework for such studies. Interest in the relationship between personality and religious behavior using the Big Five personality traits began in the mid-1980s, as this model provides a comprehensive depiction of human trait structure (Roccas et al., 2002).

The growing influence of the Five Factor Model in personality psychology has led to numerous studies examining religious personalities and specific religious behaviors through this lens. Generally, findings suggest that religious individuals tend to score high in agreeableness and conscientiousness, and there is a positive correlation between extrinsic religiosity and neuroticism (Taylor & MacDonald, 1999). However, evidence regarding other personality factors remains inconclusive.

This study aims to fill the gap in understanding the psychological underpinnings of the Piri-Muridi institution. By focusing on personality traits and their interaction with demographic variables, this research seeks to provide deeper insights into the factors that influence individuals' inclinations towards Piri-Muridi practices. These insights are expected to contribute significantly to the broader field of the psychology of religion, offering valuable perspectives for counselors, psychologists, and scholars interested in the intricate relationship between personality and religious behaviors.

According to Costa and McCrae (1999), individuals who are inherently agreeable and conscientious—traits influenced by both genetic and environmental factors—tend to embrace and maintain religious beliefs once they encounter religion as a cultural phenomenon. For these individuals, religiousness becomes a cultural characteristic adaptation of their basic tendencies, shaped by a variety of other influences. Despite this understanding, no research has been conducted within the Pakistani context to explore this relationship, particularly concerning personality traits and the Piri-Muridi (Master-Disciple) relationship.

The present study aims to fill this gap by investigating the predictive role of personality traits in shaping people's attitudes towards Piri-Muridi. Additionally, it seeks to examine how demographic variables such as age, gender, and marital status moderate this relationship. This research is exploratory in nature, providing a pioneering examination of the interplay between personality and attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi institution within Pakistan.

By leveraging the Five Factor Model of personality, this study will explore how fundamental traits like agreeableness and conscientiousness influence individuals' propensity to engage in Piri-Muridi practices. It will also assess whether these traits act as predictors of a positive attitude towards this institution. Moreover, the study will delve into the moderating effects of demographic variables, offering a nuanced understanding of how these factors influence the relationship between personality and religious practices. The findings from this study are expected to provide valuable insights for counselors, psychologists, and scholars interested in the psychology of religion. By elucidating the psychological underpinnings of the Piri-Muridi phenomenon, this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors that drive individuals towards specific religious behaviors and practices. Ultimately, this study aims to enrich the existing body of knowledge in the field of personality psychology and religious studies, highlighting the intricate connections between personality traits and religious engagement within the unique cultural context of Pakistan.

Method

This cross-sectional, quantitative study aims to determine the predictive role of personality, as measured by the NEO-PI-R, in shaping attitudes and beliefs towards the Piri-Muridi relationship. Additionally, it seeks to explore the individual differences among Murids, strong believers, situational believers, and non-believers across various personality dimensions and their facets.

Objective of the Study

To study *Piri-Muridi* relationship with reference to personality dimensions and exploring role of various demographics like belief systems, gender, age, education, marital status and profession, etc in mediating or moderating this relationship.

Sample

The study's participants consisted of 401 individuals (238 men and 163 women) selected through a purposive convenience sampling method from various segments of the population. Their ages ranged from 18 to 75 years ($M = 32.45$ years, $SD = 11.44$). Participants were categorized as follows: 83 strong believers in the *Piri-Muridi* relationship, 101 *Murids*, 108 situational believers who turn to *Piri-Muridi* in times of need, and 109 non-believers. Snowball sampling techniques were used to recruit participants, ensuring diverse representation across age groups, sects, educational levels, professions, socioeconomic statuses, and genders. The data is approximately normally distributed, with relatively even representation across each category, providing a comprehensive and balanced overview of the population studied.

Inclusion criterion for *Murids*. The *Murids* were identified by the researcher through visits to various Gaddi Nashin in Punjab and KPK Provinces, including Ghamkol Sharif, Kalyam Sharif, Golra Sharif, and Chora Sharif. The snowball sampling technique was instrumental in identifying *Murids*, with initial visits to various Gaddi Nashin leading to the identification of a few *Murids* and key personalities, who then provided connections to others. Participants underwent a brief interview to confirm they met the research criteria, specifically that they had formally taken Bayat from the Sajjada Nashin of their respective Gaddi.

Measure

The NEO Personality Inventory-Revised (NEO-PI-R) Urdu version measures the Five-Factor Model (FFM) and consists of 240 self-descriptive statements. Respondents use a five-point response scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree, to rate how accurately the statements describe themselves. The NEO-PI-R items are evenly distributed across five domain scales representing the FFM dimensions: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Each domain scale is further divided into six facet scales, each containing eight items (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

The *Piri-Muridi* scale, developed by Hassan and Kamal (2010), is a tool used to assess attitudes towards the *Piri-Muridi* relationship. This scale comprises 38 items that cover two primary factors: attitudes and beliefs about the *Piri-Muridi* relationship, and the concept of change within this relationship. For the current study, 19 items from the subscale measuring beliefs and attitudes towards *Piri-Muridi* were selected to evaluate the strength of individuals' attitudes towards this relationship. The scale demonstrates high reliability, with an alpha coefficient of .93. All 19 items are positively framed, meaning that a higher score indicates a more positive attitude and stronger belief in the *Piri-Muridi* relationship.

Procedure

Participants individually completed a self-report measure of the Big Five personality factors. They were briefed about the research purpose, and informed consent was obtained before their participation. Additionally, a demographic sheet was administered, collecting information on age, gender, sect, marital status, education, profession, and income.

Results

The data was analyzed using SPSS 25, and various analyses were performed in line with the research objectives. The results are discussed below.

To determine the predictive role of personality regarding attitudes towards the *Piri-Muridi* relationship, a stepwise regression analysis was conducted. This method is advantageous when exploring new models without an existing theoretical framework, as it identifies the most powerful predictors first, followed by

the weaker ones. In the first step, the beta value ($\beta = .31$) indicates that Neuroticism is the strongest predictor of attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi relationship, explaining 9.5% of the variance ($R^2 = .095$). In the second step, the beta value ($\beta = .21$) demonstrates a strong positive association between Agreeableness and attitudes towards Piri-Muridi, with a change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .045$) showing that Agreeableness accounts for an additional 4.5% of the variance. The combined $R^2 = .14$ in step 2 indicates that Neuroticism and Agreeableness together explain 14% of the variance in attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi relationship.

In the third step, the addition of the Openness domain, with a beta value ($\beta = -.16$), suggests that Openness negatively predicts attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi relationship. The change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .03$) indicates that Openness accounts for an additional 3% of the variance. The overall $R^2 = .17$ shows that Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Openness collectively explain 17% of the variance.

In the fourth step, the beta value ($\beta = .14$) indicates that Conscientiousness positively predicts attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi relationship. The change in R^2 ($\Delta R^2 = .01$) shows that Conscientiousness accounts for an additional 1% of the variance. The total $R^2 = .18$ indicates that Neuroticism, Agreeableness, Openness, and Conscientiousness together explain 18% of the variance in attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi relationship.

The results of the stepwise regression analysis provide a comprehensive understanding and support our primary research objective, demonstrating that personality significantly predicts beliefs and attitudes towards the Piri-Muridi relationship, with the Neuroticism domain explaining the most variance.

Moderating Role of Demographic Variables

To investigate the moderating role of various demographic variables in the relationship between personality and Piri-Muridi, a hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. The demographic variables considered as potential moderators include gender, marital status, and age. The results of this analysis are presented in the following sections.

Table 1: *Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Attitude towards Piri-Muridi from Gender and Personality Dimensions (N = 401)*

Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Step 1				
Neuroticism	.32***	.136	.136	31.34***
Gender	-.20**			
Step 2				
Neuroticism	.48***	.14	.004	1.38
Gender	-.20**			
Neuroticism \times Gender	-.17			
<hr/>				
Step 1				
Agreeableness				
Gender	.17**	.06	.06	13.25**
Step 2				
Agreeableness	-.19**			
Gender	.55**	.07	.01	7.17**
Agreeableness \times Gender	-.19**			
<hr/>				
Step 1				
Openness	-.15**	.054	.054	11.42**
Gender	-.16**			
Step 2				

Openness	.11	.061	.007	3.00
Gender	-.16**			
Openness × Gender	-.28			
<hr/>				
Step 1				
Conscientiousness	.05	.035	.035	7.20**
Gender	-.17**			
Step 2				
Conscientiousness	.28	.041	.006	2.62
Gender	-.18**			
Conscientiousness × Gender	-.24			

Note. β =Standardized Regression weights, R^2 =Explained Variance, ΔR^2 = Change in R^2

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 1 illustrates the moderating role of gender in the relationship between personality dimensions and Piri-Muridi. The overall results indicate that gender does not moderate the relationship between Neuroticism, Openness, and Conscientiousness with Piri-Muridi. However, gender does moderate the relationship in the case of Agreeableness. The significant beta value in the final model ($\beta = -.40$) and the F-value ($F = 7.17$) suggest that, after adding the interaction effect of gender in the second model, the R^2 value increased significantly ($\Delta R^2 = .01$). This indicates a moderating role of gender in the relationship between Agreeableness and Piri-Muridi. Figure 1 further illustrates that with an increase in Agreeableness scores, attitudes towards Piri-Muridi also increase, and this relationship is stronger in men compared to women.

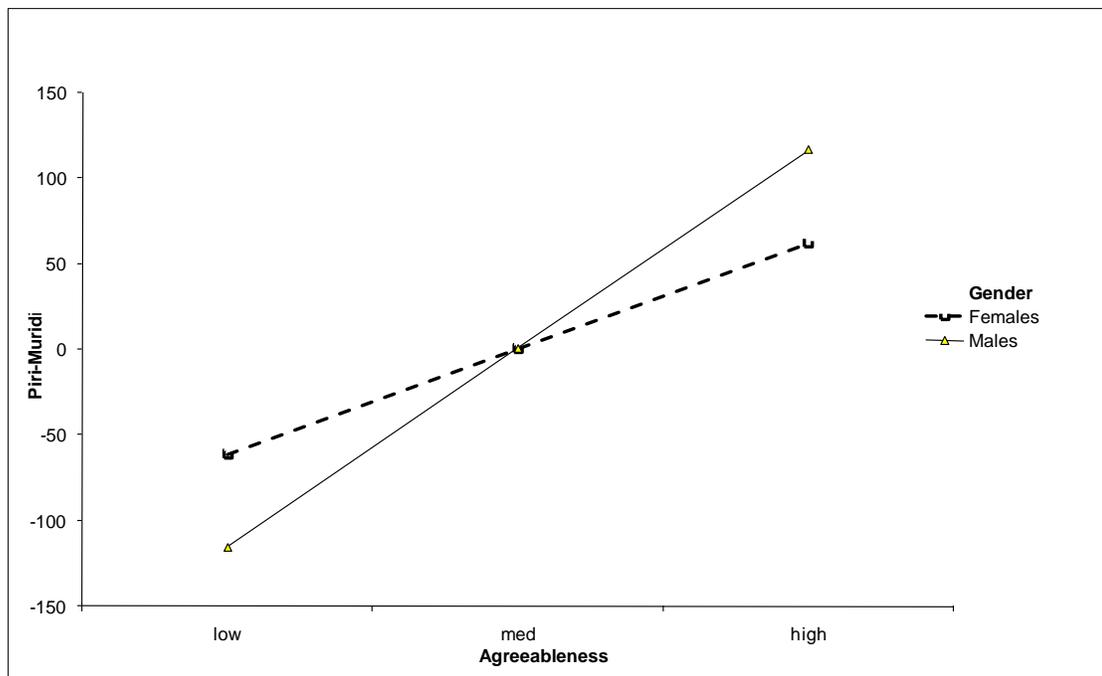


Figure 1. Modgraph presenting relationship between Agreeableness and Piri-Muridi Moderated by Gender.

Table 2: Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Attitude towards Piri-Muridi from Marital Status and Personality Dimensions (N = 401)

Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2	F
Step 1				
Neuroticism	.31***	.156	.156	36.78***
Marital Status	-.24**			
Step 2				
Neuroticism	.45***	.158	.002	1.09
Marital Status	-.24**			
Neuroticism \times Marital Status	-.14			
Step 1				
Agreeableness	.12***	.073	.073	15.61***
Marital Status	-.22**			
Step 2				
Agreeableness	.03	.074	.001	.36
Marital Status	-.21**			
Agreeableness \times Marital Status	.09			
Step 1				
Openness	-.13***	.076	.076	16.31***
Marital Status	-.21***			
Step 2				
Openness	-.53***	.094	.018	7.84***
Marital Status	-.22***			
Openness \times Marital Status	-.42***			
Step 1				
Conscientiousness	.03	.060	.060	12.76***
Marital Status	-.23**			
Step 2				
Conscientiousness	-.24	.069	.009	3.83
Marital Status	-.23**			
Conscientiousness \times Marital Status	-.29			

Note. β =Standardized Regression weights, R^2 =Explained Variance, ΔR^2 = Change in R^2

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 2 illustrates how marital status influences the connection between personality traits and Piri-Muridi. The comprehensive findings, as depicted in Table 4, indicate that marital status doesn't alter the relationship between Neuroticism, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness domains and Piri-Muridi. However, the noteworthy beta value ($\beta = -.42$) and F-statistic ($F = 7.84$) in the final model concerning the association between openness and Piri-Muridi indicate a significant change in R-squared ($\Delta R^2 = .018$) after incorporating the marital status interaction in the second model. This underscores marital status's moderating role between the criteria and predictor variables. Figure 2 further elucidates this relationship, showing that lower scores on openness correlate with higher attitudes towards Piri-Muridi, especially among married individuals compared to singles.

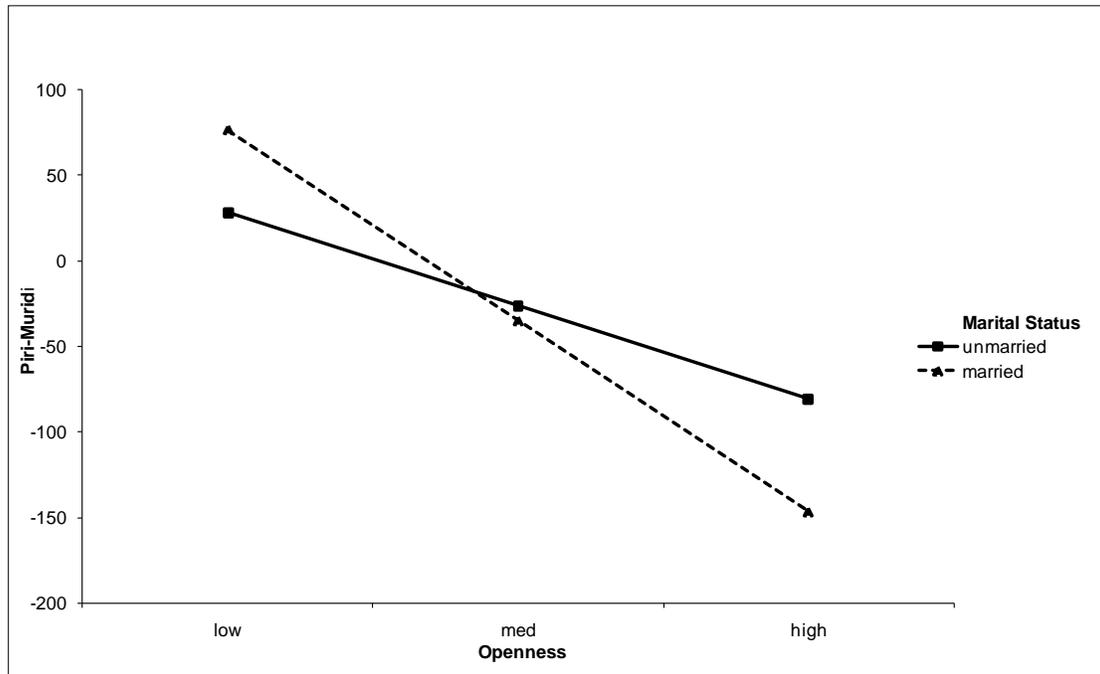


Figure 2. Modgraph presenting relationship between Openness and *Piri-Muridi* Moderated by Marital Status.

To investigate whether age moderates the relationship between personality dimensions and *Piri-Muridi*, hierarchical regression analysis was conducted. The findings indicate that age does not act as a moderator in the connection between the criterion and predictor variables. This is evident from the lack of significant F and beta values in the final models for each personality dimension.

Table 3: Moderated Hierarchical Regression Analysis Predicting Attitude towards *Piri-Muridi* from Age and Personality Dimensions ($N = 401$)

Predictors	β	R^2	ΔR^2
Step 1			
Neuroticism	.31***	.136	.136
Age	.20**		
Step 2			
Neuroticism	.31***	.14	.004
Age	.20**		
Neuroticism \times Age	.06		
Step 1			
Agreeableness	.14*	.057	.057
Age	.18**		
Step 2			
Agreeableness	.14**	.058	.001
Age	.18**		
Agreeableness \times Age	.03		

Step 1				
Openness	-.14**	.056	.056	11.83**
Age	.17**			
Step 2				
Openness	-.14	.063	.007	3.11
Age	.14**			
Openness × Age	-.08			
Step 1				
Conscientiousness	.05	.041	.041	8.60**
Age	.19**			
Step 2				
Conscientiousness	.05	.048	.007	2.84
Age	.19**			
Conscientiousness × Age	-.08			

Note. β =Standardized Regression weights, R^2 =Explained Variance, ΔR^2 = Change in R^2

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

General Discussion

This study seeks to investigate how personality traits, assessed using the NEO-PI-R Urdu version, which was adapted by (Chisti & Kamal, 2009), influence individuals' attitudes and beliefs regarding the Piri-Muridi relationship. While previous Western literature, such as studies by Eysenck (1998), Maltby & Day (2001), Saroglou (2002), Jude & Randolph (2008), and Johnstone (2012), has demonstrated the significant role of personality in shaping religious and spiritual behavior, there is a notable lack of research in our cultural context, particularly regarding Piri-Muridi instead of traditional religion and spirituality. This research gap serves as the impetus for the current study. The primary aim of this research is to investigate the predictive capacity of personality traits namely neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, as well as their various facets in influencing individuals' attitudes towards Piri-Muridi practices within the Pakistani population. To delve into this concept and address the primary objective of the study, which is to assess the predictive influence of personality on individuals' attitudes towards Piri-Muridi, step-wise regression analysis was conducted. Step-wise regression is particularly useful in scenarios where there's no established theoretical framework, as it autonomously constructs the model by prioritizing the most influential predictors, followed by others of lesser impact. The results of the step-wise regression analysis for personality dimensions are presented in Table 2. The findings indicate that the neuroticism domain emerges as a robust predictor of attitudes towards Piri-Muridi, explaining 9.5% of the variance ($\Delta R^2=.095$). This is followed by agreeableness ($\Delta R^2=.045$), openness ($\Delta R^2=.03$), and conscientiousness ($\Delta R^2=.01$), each contributing to the predictive model. Notably, among these domains, openness exhibits a negative predictive relationship with Piri-Muridi, indicated by its negative beta value ($\beta=-.16$), while the remaining domains demonstrate positive associations. Collectively, the personality dimensions account for 18% of the total variance ($R^2=.18$), highlighting their significant predictive role in understanding attitudes towards Piri-Muridi. Additionally, the findings from moderated hierarchical regression analysis suggest that the relationship between personality and Piri-Muridi is not straightforwardly linear; rather, it is influenced by various demographic factors such as gender and marital status.

Significance of the study

This research has significantly enriched the field of psychology of religion by shedding light on the various personality factors that predict attitudes within the Piri-Muridi (Master-disciple) relationship. The insights gleaned from this study hold practical value, as they can inform clinical sessions and counseling practices. By understanding how specific personality traits influence attitudes towards Piri-Muridi, counselors can better educate individuals to steer clear of harmful practices within this relationship dynamic, particularly those individuals who exhibit unique personality traits. Moreover, this study paves the way for further exploration into this phenomenon, suggesting avenues for research with diverse dimensions and approaches. Ultimately, such endeavors will advance our understanding of the psychology of religion.

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Conflict of Interest

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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