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## MISANTHROPIC ATTITUDE IN EMERGING ADULTS: EXPLORING THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE AND MORAL DISENGAGEMENT

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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
Misanthropic Attitude Emerging Adults, Religious Intolerance & Moral Disengagement	The present study examined the relationship amid religious intolerance, moral disengagement and misanthropy in adults. In order to examine the hypothesized relationship, a cross-sectional correlational research design was employed to collect data from a sample of 200 emerging adults (n = 104 men, n = 96 women) aged (18-25) years (M=21.14, SD=1.98) by using a nonprobability convenient sampling technique. The study variables were assessed through the Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (Holm, Nokelainen & Tirri, 2011), the Moral Disengagement Scale for Adults (Saif & Riaz, 2021), and Misanthropy Scale (Wuensch, 2002). The results provide significant information in reaching the conclusion. The results showed a significant positive relationship between religious intolerance, moral disengagement and misanthropy. Besides, religious intolerance and moral disengagement positively predicted misanthropy in the emerging adults. However, moral disengagement did not mediate the relationship between the religious intolerance and misanthropy. These indigenous findings would help the educational institutes to incorporate religious tolerance in emerging adults through curricula, promoting social harmony and can be used for further research exploration.
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### INTRODUCTION

Religion is a significant cultural element that holds an integral role in the development of and structuring of societies (Hafeez, 2023). Pakistan is a multicultural country with many religious communities (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Unfortunately, wave of religious intolerance in Pakistan has been growing day by day. Pakistan ranked third least tolerant nation in world in terms of social affirmation of religious diversity (Rahman, 2007). The religious intolerance in

Pakistan is so widespread that people either never bring up the subject of religion or, if they do, it becomes extremely unpleasant since nobody wants to hear what other religious group has to say (Khan, Österman & Björkqvist, 2023). Ironically, most of emerging adults are getting involved in violent activities because of their limited exposure to other beliefs and conformity to peer group attitudes (Chan, Akhter, Malik, Bilal & Sharif, 2024). In this connection, these individuals abuse their faith and religion for the negative purposes. Thus such individuals are thus likely to rationalize their actions by glorifying their in-group ideologies through victim blaming as well as dehumanization (Gunderson, 2022). This ultimately amplify the feelings of alienation and cynicism, result in the misanthropic attitudes and growing disillusionment with humanity.

Intolerance refers to the inability to accept and acknowledge the differences in perspectives of others. Thus religious intolerance was defined as negative evaluation of a group of individuals because of their religious affiliation and predisposition to treat them in the prejudiced manner (Dauda, 2020). The religious intolerance, a product of prejudice or false religious beliefs, has fostered long-lasting enmity, sectarianism, hostility, and violence among the different religious groups inside countries (Dauda, 2020). Initially, Allport (1966) recognized two basic forms of religious orientation i.e. extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity. According to a study by Allport and Ross those who are extrinsically motivated are more likely to be racist and biased (Allport & Ross, 1967). In 2001, Abu-Nimar proposed model of Interreligious Sensitivity, which explained that there are five orientations a person holds towards other religions. In this linking, Denial, Defense, and Minimization are religiocentric orientations and Acceptance and Adaptation are religiorelative orientations. Therefore, an individual who is religiocentric cannot acknowledge validity of those faiths' teachings for their adherents and depreciate other faiths (Abu-Nimer 2004).

However, such individuals cognitively disengage themselves to deliberately and selectively turn off emotional reactions of shame, guilt and regret, which in turn encourages aggression, antisocial behavior, and criminal activity (Walters, 2020). According to Bandura (2016), moral disengagement is a process that permits people to act in ways that are against their own moral principles; as these are eight interrelated cognitive processes: moral justification, euphemistic labelling, advantageous comparison, displacement of responsibility, diffusion of responsibility and disregarding or distorting the consequences, dehumanization, and attribution of blame (Bandura, 2016). Intolerance and extremism have driven young people away from constructive thinking, pushing them to engage in hostile behaviours and distorted cognitive processes (Ali, 2021) leading toward general societal mistrust & dissatisfaction with institutions, misanthropy (Alexandra, 2019). Misanthropy is understood as person's general disregard & hatred toward others and their general mistrust of them (Cattacin et al., 2006). According to research, social trust is usually lower in communities with more ethnic diversity (Dinesen et al., 2020), as for in Pakistan.

Karl Marx's theory of social conflict argues that different factions in the society are fighting for control of limited resources. The misanthropy can be seen as result of societal inequalities and conflicts. The individuals might develop the negative view of humanity due to experiences of

oppression, discrimination or systematic injustices perpetuated by the dominant social groups (Kidd, 2020). The researchers found that Misanthropy is a complex of emotions and judgments that are sparked by long-term observations of human beings' numerous moral flaws, including ingratitude, injustice, disloyalty, abuse of integrity, mistrust, and violence (Kidd, 2022). In this linking, misanthropy may be the basis of ethnocentrism and other group-specific prejudices and that a dislike of a particular group may be a sign of the general dislike of people (Ruffle & Sosis, 2020). There hasn't been much research done upon moral disengagement as a cognitive mechanisms that promote religious intolerance and in turn, leads towards the misanthropy in young adults in diverse leading situation. Consequently, this study aimed to examine intricate interaction between religious intolerance, moral disengagement and misanthropy in young adults.

### **Rationale of Study**

The young people are the heart of any nation. But situations like violence and extremism drive young people away from constructive thinking, pushing them toward violence and intolerance (Mushtaq & Kayani, 2013). Therefore individuals engage in hostile behaviours and distorted cognitive processes as result of all adverse circumstances, which keep them from experiencing any sort of guilt or shame (Abro et al., 2017). Thus, this is now Pakistani youth most significant social problem. Moreover, literature reveals that due to religious intolerance, people develop social distrust that may lead to misanthropy (Valnete & Smith, 2023; da Silva-Rebello et al., 2021; Valente & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2021). However, no study to date has examined the complex interplay among the moral disengagement, religious intolerance and misanthropy in Pakistan. Although there is enough literature and studies on the religious extremism and its causes the phenomenon of misanthropy has not been discovered yet in Pakistan and there is little or no research evidence regarding this variable. To address this knowledge gap in the literature, this indigenous study will seek to provide an inclusive framework of these factors on misanthropy as this could be important for implementing the right interventions to encourage a more compassionate and tolerant society andfor preventing the mechanisms that could lead to social discord. Keeping in view the above-mentioned research inclinations this study has following objectives:

1. To examine the relationship between moral disengagement and misanthropy.
2. To find out the link between the religious intolerance as well as misanthropy.
3. To examine mediating role of MD to link religious intolerance & misanthropy.
4. To explore mean differences in study variables across demographic variables.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Religious Intolerance & Moral Disengagement**

Bayram-Özdemir et al. (2023) conducted a study to understand the association between moral disengagement and ethnic victimization with role of bystanders in class. The findings showed that there was a higher chance of ethnic victimization among teenagers who exhibited high degrees of the moral disengagement. This study showed that to promote positive inter-ethnic relationships in schools, it is also necessary to use a strategy such as encouraging students to

critically think about their actions by educating them about moral disengagement mechanisms are inaccurate justifications that don't elevate the detrimental behaviours to a higher level of acceptability. Likewise, a pilot study was conducted by [Gunderson \(2022\)](#) to investigate the relationship amid harm & in-group/outgroup identification in guessing moral disengagement and the moral exclusion. The results revealed that those who glorified their group were more likely to participate in moral disengagement and to exclude the victims from society. When the in-group was implicated, people who were higher glorifiers of their in-group were more prone to ethically detach, place the blame on the victims, and refuse to accept responsibility for their group's inaction. Another study was carried out by [Blanco et al. \(2022\)](#) to explore relationship between violent extremism and moral disengagement in members of illegal armed groups in Colombia.

According to the result analysis, participants engage in all of Bandura's processes of moral disengagement to defend their actions within the armed group. The processes that minimized moral justification, particularly in the situation of conflict, and involvement, such as attributing action to obeying commands and shifting responsibility, were the most notable. The findings of study indicated that use of these approaches eliminated common psychological responses like fear, rejection, and moral restraints that prohibit the use of excessive violence and cruelty. To explore the mediating role of moral disengagement in relationship between ethnic prejudice and ethnic bullying, a study was conducted by Iannello and his colleagues (2021). The results demonstrated that there was a positive and direct correlation between the ethnic bullying and prejudice, with moral disengagement functioning as the partially mediating component. This demonstrated how moral detachment contributes significantly to subjective intolerance. Also, the mechanism of moral disengagement was examined in the context of religious orientation by [D'Urso et al. \(2019\)](#). Moreover, the study suggested that people were predisposed to view offences of the social group to which they belong favourably and to view the same violation committed by the social group that is not associated with them harshly ([Bhattacharyya & Ray, 2017](#)).

### **Religious Intolerance & Misanthropy**

The research on religiosity and misanthropy across racial and ethnic divides was conducted by [Valnete and Smith \(2023\)](#). The findings verified that there were notable differences between Blacks and Whites regarding the influence of religiosity on misanthropy. While weekly church attendance (social religiosity) is linked to lower levels of misanthropy among White people, it is much more connected with higher levels of misanthropy among Black and Latino people. Similarly, the results of a qualitative study conducted in Madrid, emphasized that anti-Muslim political and media propaganda fostered a radicalizing environment that resulted in social disdain and feelings of social marginalization for migrants of other nationalities particularly Muslims and Black people. Moreover, participants emphasized feelings of fear, grief, learned helplessness, frustration, rejection, rage, as well as overall mistrust ([Silva-Rebelo et al., 2021](#)). Furthermore, [Valente and Okulicz-Kozaryn \(2021\)](#) looked at the connection between social and interpersonal religion and trust. The results demonstrated that whereas the social religiosity or belonging (church attendance, service participation) predicts better levels of trust, individual

religiosity or belief (prayer, closeness, and belief in God) predicts lower levels of trust. These results implied that there is a higher degree of misanthropy among individuals who identify as religious.

### **Moral Disengagement & Misanthropy**

Research on relationship between moral disengagement and related variables of misanthropy i.e. social cynicism was conducted by [Alexandra \(2019\)](#). This study revealed that a positive relationship between moral disengagement and social cynicism. This relationship suggested a generalized, unfavourable social representation of individuals & institutions, associating them with bias, corruption, and other undesirable social phenomena. Results found that intrinsic religiosity negatively correlated with the moral disengagement; individuals realized that the justifications for abnormal behaviour were no longer valid. Research evidence confirmed that majority of Pakistani religious minorities are not happy with the way government is handling their rights and status. Religious minorities experience marginalization and prejudice in range of contexts including access to justice, work opportunities, and education, which has made religious minorities feel excluded & distrustful of governmental institutions ([Akhter, & Kaplan, 2023](#)).

This discontent may cause social tensions and impede efforts to maintain the nation's social cohesiveness ([Siddiqui et al., 2023](#)). Similarly, a case study modelled on the Pakistan's youth radicalization by [Rizvi and Jamil \(2019\)](#) explored that Pakistan's youth have been seen to be blindly walking along a path that is divided between radicalism, exclusion, isolationism, and hatred on the one hand, and secularism, unity, harmony, and peace on the other. The alarming reality was that there was a tendency to hate and demean other people, groups, minorities, and ideologies, which was dividing society gradually. So, there is a need to make a comprehensive plan to rebuild human values at the governmental and civil levels. However, the phenomenon of the misanthropy has not been discovered yet in Pakistan and there is little or no research evidence regarding this variable. In this regard, to address this knowledge gap in the literature, this indigenous study will seek to provide a comprehensive framework of these factors on the misanthropy.

### **Hypotheses of Study**

1. There would be a positive relationship between religious intolerance, misanthropy, and moral disengagement.
2. Religious intolerance and moral disengagement would likely predict misanthropy in the young adults.
3. The moral disengagement would likely to mediate between religious intolerance and misanthropy.
4. There would be the significant gender differences across the religious intolerance, moral disengagement and misanthropy.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The cross-sectional correlational research design was used to conduct this research. A sample of 200 university students (aged 18-25 years) were recruited (n=104 men, n=96 women) over

nonprobability convenient sampling technique to collect their views about research variables. The data was collected from both private and public universities of Lahore. The mean age for both the male and female participants was 21 years (SD=1.98) as revealed from demographic information.

### **Assessment Measures**

The Interreligious Sensitivity Scale (IRSS), the Moral Disengagement Scale for Adults, and the Misanthropy Scale were used as evaluation instruments for the study variables of religious intolerance, moral disengagement, and misanthropy, respectively. The IRSS was used since it included viewpoints from both categories: those who are religiocentric reject the opinions of other religious groups and believe their own faith to be better, those who are religiorelative accept and adapt to the beliefs of others. The Moral Disengagement Scale for the Adults gave information within indigenous framework. The general mistrust that emerging adults had developed as a result of the waves of bigotry and violence was reflected by the Misanthropy scale.

### **Interreligious Sensitivity Scale**

The Interreligious Sensitivity Scale was developed by [Holm et al. \(2011\)](#), consists of 15 items with 5 sub-scales or factors. Item numbers 4, 11, and 12 measure the dimension of Denial. Item 5, 6 & 13 measure defense mechanism. Item 2, 7 & 10 measure Minimization. Item numbers 1, 8 and 14 measure Acceptance. And item numbers 3, 9 and 15 measure Adaptation. All items measured on a 5-point scale from disagree (1) to totally agree (5). Cronbach's alpha reliability for IRRSS was satisfactory. All dimensions had reliabilities higher than .60, except one (Denial=.56).

### **Moral Disengagement Scale for Adults**

The moral Disengagement Scale for Adults (MDS-A) in Urdu language was developed by Saif and Riaz in 2021. MDS-A consists of 20 items, six subscales named Moral Justification (3 items), euphemistic labeling (3 items), AC (3 items), displacement of responsibility (3 items), diffusion of responsibility, distortion, disregard and minimization of consequences and dehumanization (4 items) & attribution of blame (4 items). 5-point Likert scale was used to score each response, with the strongly disagree (1) and strongly agree (5) representing the extremes. The MDS-A demonstrated excellent reliability for the scale with a very high Cronbach's alpha reliability ( $\alpha = .90$ ).

### **Misanthropy Scale**

The Misanthropy Scale was developed by Wuensch in 2002. Scale was designed to measure the general level of hatred against other individuals. The scale has five items on it. The items will be rated on a 5-point Likert scale, where the higher number, the more firmly the item is agreed with. The reflect (reverse score) items in scale are 4 and 5. Reliability was 0.78 on misanthropy scale. These scales were already used by different researchers in diverse situation with diverse outcomes.

### Procedure of Study

The research procedure started by granting permission from the relevant authors of the scales used in this research and Institutional Board of Studies. Data was taken from different public universities within Pakistan. At the beginning, participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was taken out. It hardly took about 5-10 minutes to complete the questionnaire. All the ethical considerations were taken and participants were assured of their confidentiality. The data was screened before statistical analysis. Following are results & their interpretations.

### RESULTS OF STUDY

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables (N=200)*

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Age	21.14	1.98		
Gender				
Men			104	52
Women			96	48
Education Experience	14.94	1.93		
Birth order				
First born			78	39
Middle born			72	36
Last born			42	21
Only Child			8	4

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

**Table 1A**

*Descriptive Statistics of Demographic Variables (N=200)*

<i>Demographics</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>%</i>
Ethnic Affiliation				
Punjabi			181	90
Baloch			16	8
Pashtun			2	1
Sect				
Sunni			188	94
Shia			12	6
Monthly Family Income				
Less than one lac			136	68
More than one lac			64	32
Family System				
Nuclear			129	64
Joint			71	35

Note: M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

**Table 2**  
*Psychometric Properties for Study Variables (N=200)*

Scales	M	SD	Range	α
Interreligious Sensitivity Scale				
Denial	9.43	1.49	4-14	.75
Defense	8.39	2.23	3-15	.71
Minimization	10.77	1.78	3-15	.72
Acceptance	8.42	2.08	4-14	.68
Adaptation	8.59	2.16	4-14	.69
Moral Disengagement Scale for Adults				
Moral Justification	7.33	2.72	3-15	.71
Euphemistic Labeling	8.43	2.60	3-15	.72
Advantageous Comparison	5.15	2.31	3-15	.70
Displacement of Responsibility	6.31	2.44	3-15	.70
Diffusion of Responsibility and Distortion	6.40	2.86	4-17	.71
Dehumanization and Attribution of Blame	10.40	3.70	4-20	.73
The Misanthropy Scale	12.43	3.42	5-25	.60

Note: α= Reliability Coefficient, M= Mean, SD= Standard Deviation

Table 2 presents the Cronbach Alpha for all scales and their sub-scales used in this study. The Cronbach’s alpha reliability for all the scales were in acceptable range to further proceed the analysis.

**Table 3**  
*Correlations between Demographics and Study Variables (N = 200).*

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1-Education	14.94	1.93		0.06	-.19*	0.03	0.02	-0.08	-0.1	0.05	-0.06	0.01	-0.07	0.09	-0.02	0.01
2-Ethnicity	1.11	0.39			-0.12	0.06	0.08	-0.03	0.05	0.07	0.05	.20*	-0.01	-0.09	0.01	-0.05
3-Misanthropy	12.43	3.42				.17*	0.06	.27**	0.12	.16*	.25**	-0.04	.22**	-0.04	0.01	0.1
4-MJ	7.34	2.73					.44**	.38**	.30**	.41**	.39**	0.05	0.1	0.06	-0.05	0.13
5-EL	8.44	2.61						.24**	.31**	.20**	.18*	0.03	0.1	0.05	0.05	0.08
6- AC	5.15	2.31							.45**	.52**	.22**	-0.05	0.11	0.06	0.02	0.14
7-DOR	6.32	2.44								.41**	.25**	-0.04	.18*	0.04	.23**	0.06
8-MOC	6.41	2.86									.38**	-0.11	0.07	-.18*	0.06	0.02
9-DAOB	10.4	3.71										-0.03	0.07	0.06	0.01	0.02
10-Denial	9.43	1.49											0.11	.23**	0.08	0.1
11-Defense	8.39	2.23												0.09	.29**	.19**
12-Minimization	10.77	1.78													.26**	.32**
13-Acceptance	8.42	2.08														.48**
14-Adaptation	8.6	2.16														

Note: \*p < .05; \*\*p < .01; \*\*\*p < .00; MJ= Moral Justification; EL= Euphemistic Labeling; AC= Advantageous Comparison; DOR = Diffusion of Responsibility; MOC =Minimization of Consequences; DAOB= Displacement and Attribution of Blam.

Table showed that moral disengagement mechanisms were positively & significantly correlated to misanthropy. Moral justification, advantageous comparison, minimization of consequences and dehumanization and attribution of blame had shown positive correlation to misanthropy. While displacement of responsibility was positively correlated to the religiocentric orientation;



defense reaction and minimization. Besides, Misanthropy was positively correlated to defense reactions religious orientation. Additionally, results indicated that education was negatively correlated to the misanthropy and ethnicity was positively correlated with the denial of other religions.

**Table 4**  
*Regression Coefficients of Religious Intolerance and Moral Disengagement on Misanthropy*

Variable	B	95% CI		SE B	$\beta$	R2	$\Delta R2$
		LL	UL				
Step 1						.05	.05*
Constant	9.60***	7.78	11.41	.92			
Defense	.34**	.13	.55	.11	.25**		
Step 2						.15	.10***
Constant	7.06***	4.65	9.45	1.22			
Defense	.32**	.10	.49	.12	.21**		
Advantageous Comparison	.37**	.13	.61	.12	.21**		
Attribution of Blame	.19**	.06	.32	.07	.19**		

Note. CI= Confidence Interval; LL =lower limit; UL =upper limit; \*\* p <.01

Table 4 shows the impact of religious intolerance and moral disengagement on misanthropy in emerging adults. In Step 1, the R2 value revealed that defense reaction; subscale of the religious intolerance explained 5% variance in misanthropy with  $F(1, 198) = 10.13, p <.01$ . These results revealed that defense reaction positively predicted misanthropy ( $\beta = .25, p <.01$ ) indicating that individuals who considered faith superior to other’s were misanthropic. In Step 2, R2 revealed that advantageous comparison and attribution of blame; mechanisms of moral disengagement explained a 15% variance in misanthropy with  $F(7, 192) = 4.91, p <.01$ . Findings revealed that moral DM positively predicted misanthropy ( $\beta = .21, p <.01; \beta = .19, p <.01$  respectively). The  $\Delta R2$  value of .10 predicted a 10% chance in variance model 1 & model 2 with  $\Delta F(6, 192) = 3.89, p <.001$ .

**Table 5**  
*Results from Process Analysis for Mediation Model (N=200)*

Total effect	Direct effect	SE	t	p
Outcome: Misanthropy				
Constant	7.65	1.93	3.96	.0001
Religious Intolerance	.03	.04	.69	.48
Moral Disengagement	.08	.02	3.74	.0002
Moral disengagement as outcome of Religious intolerance	.06	.04	1.63	.10
Indirect Effects	Effect	SE	BootLLCI	BootULCI
Religious Intolerance- > Moral disengagement- > Misanthropy	.005	.011	-.02	.03

Note. B= Unstandardized Coefficient; SE= Standard Error; Boot= Bootstrap; LL= Lower limit; UL= Upper limit; CI= Confidential Interval

Results indicated that religious intolerance did not significantly predict moral disengagement and misanthropy. However, MD was a positive and significant predictor of the misanthropy. Indirect effects were reported as non-significant. Therefore, the findings did not support the hypothesis that moral disengagement mediated relationship between religious intolerance and misanthropy.

**Table 6**  
*Independent Samples t-test for Gender Differences (N=200)*

Variable	Men (n=104)		Women (n=96)		t(198)	p	Cohen's d
	M	SD	M	SD			
Religious Intolerance	45.67	6.56	45.54	5.45	1.54	.87	.02
Moral Disengagement	45.21	11.46	42.77	10.45	1.56	.12	.26
Misanthropy	12.26	3.60	12.62	3.22	-.75	.45	.16

Note: M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation

Table 6 revealed that no significant mean differences were found in exhibiting misanthropy with  $t(198) = -.75, p > .05$ . The findings revealed that men ( $M=12.26, SD= 3.60$ ) and women ( $M=12.62, SD= 3.22$ ) exhibit same level of misanthropy. Furthermore, gender differences were non-significant in religious intolerance and moral disengagement. Hence, our hypothesis was rejected.

## DISCUSSION

The present study was aimed at exploring the relationship between religious intolerance and misanthropy, with mediating role of moral disengagement. The findings of the study revealed that religious intolerance and misanthropy were positively correlated. Defense reaction was positively correlated to misanthropy which suggested those who glorify their group and have in-group bias were likely to have general disdain and hatred towards others. Findings were supported by previous literature that social religiosity was related with misanthropic emotions across all groups as form of social capital (Valnete & Smith, 2023). Qualitative study conducted by Silva et al (2021) suggested that the anti-Muslim political and media propaganda fostered radicalizing environment resulted in social disdain and feelings of the social marginalization, eliciting feelings of fear, grief, learnt helplessness, frustration, rejection, rage & overall mistrust. Also, religious intolerance was positively correlated with moral disengagement mechanisms. The findings were consistent with the literature. In a study, Alexandra (2019) revealed that the impacts of social cynicism and social complexity worldview on moral disengagement were stronger.

Another empirical evidence suggested that moral disengagement increases the subtle level of ethnic prejudice (D'Urso et al., 2023). Another study discovered a stronger positive association between witnessing, deploying hate speech online and higher levels of moral disengagement (Wachs et al., 2022). Findings revealed that defense reaction positively predicts misanthropy. This implies that religious intolerance had significant cause-and-effect bond with misanthropy. Previous research revealed weak but statistically significant correlation between misanthropy and ethnocentrism, indicating that misanthropy may be the root cause of both ethnocentrism

and other group-specific prejudices and disliking a particular group may be a sign of disliking people in general (McGraw, 2014). Likewise, data from previous literature show that religiosity is a substantial determinant of social trust and misanthropy (Valente & Okulicz-Kozaryn, 2021). Besides, findings revealed that moral disengagement positively predicted misanthropy. Helpful comparison and attribution of blame were strong predictors of misanthropy in this study.

Findings were in line with previous literature. Researchers have found that social dominance, low empathy, and higher levels of moral disengagement predicted online and offline forms of hate speech perpetration (Castellanos et al., 2024). The second goal of this study was to figure out mediating role of moral disengagement. The findings of the study rejected the hypotheses that moral disengagement mediates relationship between religious intolerance & misanthropy. The findings were contradictory to previous literature in which moral disengagement was seen to mediate the relationship between ethnic prejudices and ethnic bullying (Iannello et al., 2021). This could be because of the social desirability bias, in which individuals understate or overstate their likelihood of engaging in unethical or desirable actions respectively (Larson, 2019). The participants might have under-reported their true levels of religious intolerance and use of moral disengagement mechanisms to avoid being perceived as prejudiced and maintain their positive self-image. Moreover, the research evidence suggested that religious intolerance can have the direct influence on the misanthropy without the mediational role of the moral disengagement.

The strong in-group identification and perceived threats from the out-group can cause general mistrust and hostility towards all, leading directly to a misanthropic viewpoint (Stephan et al., 2015). So, in conclusion, individuals use moral disengagement mechanisms to justify their harmful behaviours which they perpetrate through showing the intolerance and misanthropic attitudes towards others. Moreover, the results for gender differences were non-significant. It was consistent with the previous studies. In this connection, the researchers found that the difference between males and females on the measure of misanthropy does not rise to the level of statistical significance indicated that changing gender roles and the fact that women and men compete for the same resources may be impacting the relationship between the sex and misanthropy (Mankar, & Sarhan, 2024). Likewise, the findings revealed that the educational experience was a negative predictor of the misanthropy. Researches found that higher level of education reduces misanthropy (Melger et al., 2008) and increases level of tolerance (Arif et al., 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

The outcome of the study showed that adults who displayed religious intolerance and were morally disengaged had shown misanthropic tendencies. This means that the strong in-group identification lead the individuals towards cognitive justification for unethical behaviors and general hostility towards all. Still, moral disengagement mechanisms could not mediate relationship between religious intolerance and misanthropy, religious intolerance can directly influence misanthropic attitude of adults. Males & females exhibit equal levels of misanthropy

and adults with higher educational experience showed less misanthropy than less educated adults.

### **Limitations and Suggestions**

The findings might be limited by the sample size and demographic diversity. Emerging adults from public universities were selected to participate, therefore findings cannot be generalized to other sectors. A larger and more diverse sample can provide more generalizable results. It has been suggested that participants from other educational institutes like madrassas should be included in future studies for more clear understanding of the incidences. Moreover, this study involved the descriptive-predictive approach, therefore causal relationships between the variables could not be established. It has been recommended that qualitative research should be incorporated for a more nuanced understanding of variables like misanthropy in a cultural context.

### **Implications**

The present study helps us better understand the relationship between religious intolerance, moral disengagement and misanthropy in young adults. As per my knowledge, there is no research on misanthropy in Pakistan that is in combination with moral disengagement and religious intolerance, this research can be used as a reference in future studies. In this regard, the educational institutions might consider incorporating the curricula that focus on ethical reasoning, critical thinking, and religious tolerance to reduce misanthropy and promote social harmony.

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