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RESEARCH PAPER

Exploring the Psychological and Socio-Economic Impacts of Vandalism among Religious Minorities: A Post-Incident Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the social, economic, and psychological consequences of the incident, contributing to broader discussions on community resilience, recovery, and the role of institutional support in post-conflict settings. Religious acts of vandalism in Pakistan exceed simple property damage because they expose existing social divisions within the country. Identity-based hostility demonstrates itself through the destruction of religious scriptures and places of worship, as well as the damage to religious symbols. The research design employs systematic sampling (n=48) based on Cochran's formula to study the effects of mob attacks on the community. The numerical data for violence-related damages and psychosocial effects stemmed from structured surveys (α>0.80). Bivariate/correlation analyses identified variable relationships. This study's multiple regression analysis identified unemployment as the strongest predictor of community relationship deterioration post-religious vandalism, correlating with stress. Gender showed marginal significance. To enhance community resilience, job creation programs and economic support for vulnerable groups may be prioritized by the responsible state bodies.

| **KEYWORDS** | Religious Vandalism, Psychological Effects, Minorities, Violence, Interfaith Relations |

Introduction

The occurrence of religious vandalism in Pakistan has grown steadily since 1947 into a major sociopolitical phenomenon that has increased through the development of religious nationalism. The official establishment of Pakistan as an Islamic republic supports institutional discrimination against religious minorities, which they face (Nasr 2000; Brohi 2016). The Islamization policies from the 1970s deepened religious differences, which ultimately established discriminatory legal systems, especially the blasphemy laws (Nahri, 2018; Siddique & Hayat, 2008). The research examines how prejudicial attitudes dating back to history and institutional discrimination practices maintain violent actions against religious minority groups by studying religious vandalism within organized discriminatory systems.

Religious acts of vandalism in Pakistan exceed simple property damage because they expose existing social divisions within the country. Identity-based hostility demonstrates itself through the destruction of religious scriptures and places of worship as well as the damage of religious symbols (Fox & Akbaba, 2015; Amnesty International, 2020). Both physical structures and religious symbols and practices,

which represent fundamental religious identity, stand as the main targets of extremism-based attacks that demonstrate structural discrimination.

Persons who commit religious vandalism attack faith-linked symbols, together with sites and specific religious practices. Religious vandalism in Pakistan serves as a tool to eliminate minority voices throughout the country. Saints and followers of Ahmadi Islam experience recurring vandalism of their mosques due to differing Islamic beliefs with Sunni Islam (Grare, 2017; Akram et al., 2021). These acts form part of a broader systemic intolerance that political actors use to rally religious sentiments, according to Berman (2020) and Munir and Bangash (2021).

Three distinct types of religious vandalism occur in Pakistan, which worsen both community and inter-sectarian feuds across the nation. Firstly, Physical destruction attacks houses of worship, utilizing arson alongside mob violence and offering demolition as another strategy. The 2023 Jaranwala attacks, which destroyed twenty-one churches, represent the current pattern of religious vandalism that deeply traumatized Christian community members (Hussain et al., 2025). Secondly, the practice of symbolic desecration occurs when individuals intentionally deface sacred objects that include Hindu idols and Quranic verses to worsen community tensions (Amineddoleh, 2015; Aleksandrenko & Veselovska, 2014). Thirdly, legal persecution enacted blasphemy laws (that include Section 295-C) led to 1,865 documented cases targeting Muslims, Christians, and Ahmadis during the 2010–2022 period, which triggered religious violence according to NCHR (2024) and NCJP (2022). Pakistan experiences increased political instability through these combined religious acts, which destroy religious harmony (Kriesberg, 2015).

Various components drive the occurrences of religious vandalism throughout Pakistan. Anti-Ahmadi Ordinance XX (1984) represents structural discrimination since it operates as legal prejudice against minority religious practice, which leads to violent normalization (Brohi, 2016; Fox, 2000). Fundamental leaders exploit religion to gather mobs, which they can use as a distraction so people stop criticizing their failed governance (Berman, 2020; Bennett-Jones, 2016), along with politicians who use religious groups for their benefit (Berman, 2020; Bennett-Jones, 2016). The high poverty rate in Pakistan harms Christians' vulnerabilities because 58 percent of Pakistani Christians are poor, as confirmed by the World Bank (2020) and Chuah et al. (2016). Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) members, with their ideology of extremist beliefs, promote vandalism as their Islamic religious defense of pure principles, according to Grare (2017) and Awan (2017).

Religious vandalism leads to destructive consequences that transcend the physical destruction of property. Substantially damaged social relations between faith groups that result in widespread public division (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Davidson, 2008). According to Human Rights Watch (2023) and Wu and Schimmele (2021), evidence shows that 72% of the victims deal with ongoing anxiety, together with persistent fear when performing religious acts. Religious vandalism simultaneously violates human rights and destroys national stability, as demonstrated by these scientific studies (United Nations, 2019; Annan, 2009).

Literature Review

The deliberate destruction of religious properties and symbols alongside practices qualified as religious vandalism seeks to dissolve spiritual community

identity (Hussain et al., 2025). Ordinary vandalism creates no comparable effect because its deliberate objectives align with particular religious groups (Amineddoleh, 2015). Such expressions of religious hostility appear as church burnings combined with temple demolitions and scripture desecration throughout Pakistan since the nation experiences intense socio-religious tensions (Akram et al., 2021).

Since its founding as the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, the country has adopted a path which progressively diminished the rights of religious minority groups. Pakistan began as a Muslim homeland in 1947 and completed its extensive process of Islamization under Zia-ul-Haq's rule from 1977 to 1988, when the administration implemented discriminatory laws that established Sunni domination (Nasr, 2000). Violence against religious minorities has been made permissible through the blasphemy laws (Sections 295-298 PPC) and the anti-Ahmadi Ordinance XX (1984) (Nahri, 2018). The legal framework permits officials and mobs to categorize minority religious sites as "illegal" before they launch such attacks with pretenses under Islamic sanctity claims (Grare, 2017). The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (2023) ranks Pakistan as one of the countries with the highest religious freedom violations continuously since its formation.

Religious vandalism serves as a power-consolidation tool, which the Conflict Theory explains systematically. The Sunni population, which constitutes 96% of Pakistan, maintains control through official systems that dominate the 4% minority groups consisting of Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 2023). Social violence occurs through blasphemy laws because people frequently start violent attacks against minority properties (Amnesty International, 2020). Political actors use strategically manipulated religious differences to avoid scrutiny of government failures while they still support elections (Jaffrelot, 2016; Berman, 2020). Events in the 2023 Jaranwala attack displayed state tolerance of violent attacks against religious minorities when 21 Christian churches became targets of destruction (Hussain et al., 2025).

Religious vandalism receives analysis through Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), which explains its psychological traits. Within Pakistan, religious beliefs act as the main identifier of social groups, with Sunni Islam holding the position of the prevailing in-group. Religious minorities suffer vandalism, which serves as a boundary maintenance ritual to establish their distinction from the wider Pakistani community (Fox & Akbaba, 2015). Through acts of Hindu temple desecration and Christian scripture burning, the nation achieves two goals: it enhances national purity and it keeps minority groups outside of sociocultural participation (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Per the theoretical perspective, people may join collective violence when their desire for in-group approval surpasses their convictions (Zimbardo, 1969).

The deindividuation phenomenon explains the mechanisms behind mob violence directed towards vandalism. According to Zimbardo (1969), group anonymity combined with shared responsibility leads individuals to perform actions they would not commit independently. During the Jaranwala riots, the collective approach to attacks combined with anticipated immunity allowed extremists to engage in extensive damage to religious properties (Hussain et al., 2025). Through digital platforms, dangerous content spreads quickly to ignite offline violence, according to Conway (2016) and Cohen-Almagor (2018).

The worldwide banking institution shows that 58% of Pakistani Christians exist beneath the poverty line, which makes them easy targets for persecution (World Bank, 2020). Religious sites that suffer vandalism trigger a 30-40% decrease in income for minority-run businesses operating in the nearby areas, according to NCJP (2022). Through TLP and other political groups, vulnerabilities between minorities and the political system allow them to advocate for violent demonstrations as religious practices (Awan, 2017). Law enforcement has almost no power to punish those who commit acts of violence that sustain continuous cycles of violence (NCHR, 2024).

Religious vandalism leads to more than just physical losses because it creates severe psychological harm to victims. Statistical data shows that chronic public religious practice anxiety affects 72% of targeted victims (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Religious vandalism leads to declining trust between groups, which drives social isolation among minority groups, according to Kriesberg (2015). The declining religious freedom status of Pakistan results in major impacts on international relations and economic opportunities because foreign investment decreases.

Research verifies that religious vandalism across Pakistan exists as a complex matter originating from the historical oppression of religious groups and societal power politics, and social groups. Systematic violence, together with social-group behavior dynamics and patterns of economic marginalization, creates a shield that protects religious attacks in the sociopolitical space. Studies of social behaviour and conflict reveal both organizational decision-making structures and specific individual conduct that enable incorrect persecution in Pakistan.

Researchers have analyzed the Jaranwala incident to determine how impacted Christians view the underlying factors behind religious attacks, along with their consequences for the community. A violent mob destroyed religious sites in Jaranwala on August 16, 2023, which generated instant effects that continue to affect the community. The damage from the attack eliminated safety perceptions and membership unity while destroying identity bonds of the victimized group. The psychological damage involves enduring trauma along with persistent fear as well as ongoing vulnerability, yet property damages lead to financial loss, added to interrupted earnings and business activity. The research investigates how members of the community understand religious vandalism through an economic and psychological, and social framework. This research initiative works to develop interfaith discussions and build social cohesion while guiding policymakers to establish strategies against religious conflicts and reinforce community resistance against violence.

Research Hypothesis

H1 There is a significant positive relationship between unemployment and psychological distress, specifically stress, anxiety, and fear, among individuals affected by religious vandalism.

H2 There is a significant positive relationship between pre-existing community cohesion (social harmony) and the severity of community disruption (deterioration in community relationships and harmony) following an incident of religious vandalism.

H3   There is a significant relationship between sectarian divisions within the community (i.e., religious affiliation) and the psychological distress outcomes (fear, anxiety, stress, PTSD symptoms, and nervousness) experienced by individuals after an incident of religious vandalism.

Material and Methods

This study employs a quantitative research design to analyze the impact of mob attacks on the Christian community in Jaranwala, focusing on numerical data collection and statistical analysis. The primary objective is to examine the relationship between independent variables (e.g., mob violence) and dependent variables (e.g., physical damage, social and psychological impact) within the affected population (Babbie, 2009).

Population and Sampling: The study's target population consists of individuals directly or indirectly affected by the Jaranwala incident, including victims, community leaders, religious scholars, local authorities, and social activists. This group represents the primary interest of the study (Neuman, 2006). A systematic sampling technique was used to select participants. The sampling frame was divided into intervals, and the Simple Random Sampling (SRS) method was applied to choose one element from the first interval. Subsequent selections followed the same order, ensuring a representative sample (Kumar, 2011). The sample size was based on Cochran's formula for sample size determination; a sample size of 48 individuals was determined, ensuring adequate representation for quantitative analysis (Kumar, 2011).

Data collection: The survey method was chosen for data collection, utilizing a standardized questionnaire. Surveys are effective for gathering numerical data and analyzing patterns within a population (Babbie, 2005). Structured interview schedules were used to collect data. This method was particularly suitable given the sensitive nature of the study and the need for direct interaction with the affected community (Babbie, 2005). The pre-test was conducted with 8 members to assess its validity, reliability, and clarity. The internal consistency of the survey items was measured, with reliability scores above 0.80, ensuring robust measurement.

Data Analysis Technique: A bivariate and correlation statistics analysis was chosen to examine the fundamental characteristics. Pearson correlation and coefficient analysis were used to identify important variable relationships for determining meaningful associations within the data.

The research participants received complete information about procedures and privacy protection measures, along with their withdrawal rights during any phase of the study. The researchers took safety measures when conducting interviews about sensitive traumas because they made participant health and safety their primary concern.

Results and Discussion

Table 01
Showing Descriptive Statistics of Demographics Information

Variable	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Age Category	1	5	3.27	1.125
Gender (1=M, 2=F)	1	2	1.35	0.483
Religious Sect	1	2	1.19	0.394

Educational Level	1	6	2.46	1.320
Employment Status	1	6	3.71	1.946

Descriptive statistics were used to provide insights into the demographic characteristics of the sample population (N=48). Participants' ages were distributed across categories: 4.2% (18–24 years), 25.0% (25–31 years), 25.0% (32–38 years), 31.3% (39–45 years), and 14.6% aged 56 and above. The sample comprised 64.6% males and 35.4% females, predominantly Catholic (81.3%), with a minority identifying as Protestant (18.8%). Educational levels indicated limited formal education, with a substantial proportion classified as illiterate (29.2%), or having completed primary (25.0%) or middle education (27.1%). Employment status was diverse, including laborers (29.2%), public sector employees (22.9%), self-employed (16.7%), household workers (14.6%), unemployed (10.4%), and private sector employees (6.3%).

Hypotheses Testing

Pearson correlation analysis examined relationships between unemployment and psychological outcomes, including fear, anxiety, and stress. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between unemployment and stress ($r = 0.327$, $p < 0.05$), aligning with previous literature linking unemployment to increased psychological stress (Paul & Moser, 2009). Correlations with fear ($r = 0.241$, $p > 0.05$) and anxiety ($r = 0.189$, $p > 0.05$) were positive but not statistically significant, suggesting unemployment predominantly influences stress rather than broader psychological distress in this sample.

Table 02
Showing the Correlation of Unemployment with Stress, Fear, and Anxiety

Variables	Unemployment
Stress	0.327*
Fear	0.241
Anxiety	0.189
*p < 0.05	

H1 is partially supported, highlighting unemployment's specific association with increased stress but limited impacts on anxiety and fear.

The correlation analysis robustly supported H2. Strong positive correlations were found between pre-incident community cohesion and negative impacts on community health post-incident. Results included strong correlations between community cohesion and relationship deterioration ($r = 0.857$, $p < 0.01$), cohesion among religious groups ($r = 0.896$, $p < 0.01$), and negative impacts on inter-community harmony ($r = 0.839$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 03
Showing the Correlation of Social Cohesion with Relationship and Inter-Group Harmony

Variables	Cohesion (Pre-Incident)
Relationship Deterioration	0.857**
Cohesion Among Religious Groups	0.896**
Negative Impact on Inter-Group Harmony	0.839**
**p < 0.01	

Strong correlations suggest communities with high initial cohesion experienced significant disruption post-incident, possibly indicating heightened vulnerability or unmet expectations of resilience.

Correlation analysis indicated negligible and non-significant relationships between religious sect and psychological distress outcomes, including fear (r = -.033), anxiety (r = .037), stress (r = -.009), PTSD-like symptoms (r = -.060), and nervousness (r = .093), all with p-values > 0.05.

Table 04
Correlation of Sectarian Division with Fear, Anxiety, Stress, PTSD, and Nervousness

Variables	Sectarian Division
Fear	-.033
Anxiety	.037
Stress	-.009
PTSD Symptoms	-.060
Nervousness	.093

H3 is not supported by the data, suggesting psychological impacts of vandalism were uniformly experienced regardless of sectarian affiliation.

Advanced Statistical Analysis

A multiple regression analysis was performed using Relationship Deterioration (post-incident community relationship deterioration) as the dependent variable and Community Cohesion (pre-incident), along with demographic variables (Age, Gender, Education Level, Unemployment) as independent variables.

The variation based on R-squared (0.195), (Approximately 19.5% of the variance in relationship deterioration is explained by the selected variables). Adjusted R-squared: 0.099, indicating moderate explanatory power of the included variables. Even though it did not reach conventional statistical significance at α = 0.05. F-statistic: 2.029, p = 0.0942, suggestig the model is marginally significant.

Table 05
Showing the Coefficient Analysis

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	t-value	p-value	Interpretation
Intercept	4.6705	0.655	7.127	0.000	Statistically significant (baseline).
Community Cohesion	0.0135	0.145	0.093	0.926	Not significant, minimal effect.
Age	-0.0031	0.057	-0.055	0.956	Not significant, negligible effect.
Gender	-0.2959	0.156	-1.900	0.064	Marginally significant, negative impact indicating females may report slightly less deterioration.
Education Level	-0.0488	0.053	-0.924	0.361	Not significant, minimal effect.
Unemployment	0.4539	0.223	2.036	0.048	Statistically significant, positive impact indicating higher deterioration reported by unemployed individuals.

Unemployment functions as a major contributing factor (p = 0.048), which intensifies the negative effects on community relationships after the incident, according to the regression analysis. Gender status produced minor but noticeable statistical

results at p = 0.064, implying that female community members potentially experienced somewhat different levels of deterioration during the pandemic. Analysis results demonstrate that community cohesion and deterioration have complex relationships because other demographic factors affect their expected correlation.

Discussion

This study conducted a multiple regression and correlational analysis to understand factors influencing community relationship deterioration following an incident of religious vandalism. The analysis revealed several noteworthy insights into the underlying dynamics of community cohesion and demographic influences on social outcomes.

The most significant predictor identified was unemployment, showing a positive and statistically significant relationship with community relationship deterioration. This aligns with existing literature indicating that unemployment exacerbates psychological stress and negatively impacts social interactions within communities (Paul & Moser, 2009). Correlation analysis further supports this finding, highlighting a positive correlation between unemployment and reported stress (r = 0.327, p < 0.05). The economic strain associated with unemployment likely heightens vulnerability, reducing individuals' resilience and ability to maintain harmonious community relationships during crises. Consequently, policy interventions aimed at economic empowerment and job creation could significantly enhance community resilience and social harmony post-incident.

Gender emerged as a marginally significant variable in the regression analysis, indicating potential gender-based differences in perceived relationship deterioration, with females reporting slightly lower deterioration. While marginally significant, this finding suggests an underlying difference in how community disruption is experienced or reported across genders, possibly related to differing social roles, emotional processing, or support networks. Literature on gender differences in trauma and community crises generally supports these nuanced experiences (Norris et al., 2008). Future research should explore these nuances further to better tailor post-incident interventions and support mechanisms.

Contrary to expectations based on initial correlation results, pre-incident community cohesion was not significant in the regression model when controlling for demographic factors. Although correlation analysis showed a robust association between pre-incident cohesion and subsequent deterioration (r = 0.857, p < 0.01), the regression results suggest that this relationship might be more complex or mediated by other factors. This finding challenges assumptions in resilience literature that strong pre-existing cohesion universally buffers against negative community outcomes post-crisis (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015). It may indicate heightened collective vulnerability or unmet expectations in highly cohesive communities experiencing disruptions. These complexities emphasize the importance of preparing communities for adaptive resilience and effectively managing collective expectations during crises.

Age and education level showed minimal and statistically no significant effects on community relationship deterioration. These research findings agree with Bonanno et al. (2010) that demographic variables exhibit a reduced impact on predicting community crisis responses compared to economic and social variables. Future

research using larger, diversified samples might yield further insights into these demographic influences.

The moderate explanatory power of the regression model (R-squared = 0.195) indicates that additional unmeasured variables likely influence community relationships post-incident. Potential factors might include community leadership, local governance responses, psychological resilience, and incident-specific severity. Future research could benefit from integrating these additional variables to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of community dynamics following religious vandalism.

In conclusion, the relationship between unemployment rates and community outcomes after traumatic events is confirmed by the regression findings, which align with the correlational results in this research. Further investigation should explore these important gender dynamics, which become visible in the research. The acquired insights guide policymakers and community leaders, and social service providers in their mission to build resilient communities that have shown vulnerability to future incidents.

Conclusion

This research examines all psychological and economic, and social consequences of religious vandalism against minority populations while studying the Jaranwala event from 2023 in Pakistan. Research findings show that joblessness functions as a crucial determinant for psychological distress, mostly through stress for victims in the violence recovery phases. Previous levels of community cohesion within communities demonstrate a direct link to the deterioration of relationships following violent incidents. The regression analysis reveals that unemployment intensifies communal hostility and demonstrates minimal gender-related changes in societal decline. Targeted policy interventions with economic rehabilitation programs and psychosocial support are necessary to prevent long-term effects, according to these findings. Further research is required to validate cause-and-effect relationships because the study faces limitations from its cross-sectional design and limited sample size. Additionally, this research should investigate the reactions of institutions and leadership roles as part of recovery strategies. The study contributes to general studies about religious violence and minority rights and community recovery while advocating for policies that unite economic relief with social cohesion for sustainable wartime recovery.

Recommendations

The cross-sectional, correlational design precludes causal inferences. Future research could employ larger, diversified samples, longitudinal approaches, and multivariate analyses (e.g., regression) to explore causal mechanisms and control potential confounding variables. Additionally, employing non-parametric analyses or validating findings with qualitative insights could enrich understanding and robustness. The quantitative analysis provides meaningful insights into the psychosocial impact of religious vandalism, emphasizing specific vulnerabilities (e.g., stress linked to unemployment) and highlighting complex dynamics in social cohesion. Further research is recommended with larger samples or longitudinal designs to clarify the nuanced relationships among these variables.

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