

Multidimensional Self-Perceived Freedom: Importance and Domain Specification

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Abstract: The purpose of this exploratory qualitative study is to specify the importance and domains in terms of multidimensional self-perceived freedom through Focus Group Discussions (FGD) conducted with marginalized Pakistani youths. In total, three homogenous FGD are conducted in which twenty eligible volunteer youths are being selected through multi-stage random sampling. As an inclusion, all youths belong to age group of 15-24 years and they are residents from three sub-districts (Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar, Jalalpur Peerwala) of Punjab, Pakistan that are already established least quality of life zones of Punjab. Data are audio and video taped and transcribed carefully by veteran panel of field experts. To arrive at prudent findings, inductive thematic analysis is employed; findings are counter checked by two expert judges to avoid biases. Conclusively, importance of self-perceived freedom declared as vital part of Pakistani youth and there are ten domains come out that encompass the priority of youth in terms of freedom. Based on these findings, a questionnaire would be developed to measure the overall degree of multidimensional self-perceived freedom among youngsters.

Key words: Exploratory study, multidimensional self-perceived freedom, FGD, marginalized youth, inductive thematic analysis, importance and domain specification

INTRODUCTION

A prompt change from modernity to late modernity among youth is being noticed and reported that encompasses the incoherence between personal experiences of young and their affiliation with public institutions (Karvonen *et al.*, 2012). This transformation relates to identity, values and role orientations, however, not well-defined by tradition, resultantly. Consequent upon, youth face new stresses concerning core societal institutions such as family, work, authorities, the political system and the state. Whereas, modernity depicts the form of identity nourished under the cover of traditions, national culture and structural positions. On the other hand, late modernity focuses individualism or autonomous from social structure and cultural inspirations.

A plethora of studies (Giddens, 1991; Inglehart, 1997) reported same stance for youth that late modern value orientation stem from rejection of traditions (such as

family roles, traditional political systems and national values, etc.) Secondly, value orientations, neither have a capacity to form intelligible construction for individuals, nor for nationalities; this would resultantly cause fragmentation of identity in youth.

Keeping in view the above cited scenario, Pakistani youth living at precarious locations has already been reported fragmented and incoherent with traditions with special reference to autonomy and freedom (Saleem *et al.*, in press). Resultantly, ratio of run away from homes (truancy rate) is gradually progressing, and truants fix the responsibility on their parents (Idrees and Manzoor, 2012); on the other hand, parents justify their parenting styles arguing a matter of care and concern for their children. Therefore, the potential difference would prevail in perception give and take of freedom.

Background of the term' perceived freedom: Four decades ago, Heider (1958) postulated the importance of perceived freedom with an impact and control over human behavior. Further, he was convinced that one's

actions are being judged through sense of perceived freedom. Other researchers (Kane *et al.*, 1977) reported that perceived freedom is highly related with responsibility and intention.

Perceived freedom eventually became popular as a construct when Neulinger's theory of leisure as a mind state was devised in 1974 in which Neulinger defined perceived freedom as a "state of mind where one freely chooses to perform an activity any activity because one "wants to do it". To know the causes of one's own and other's leisure behaviors and experiences, this connotation was used in terms of attribution.

Historic and in-depth consideration about the nature of freedom proved it as a complicated domain that has been transformed by philosophical debates (like, Immanuel Kant theory of freedom), socio-cultural beliefs and political forces solely based on impulsivity of perceived action or subjective experiences (Wu *et al.*, 2010).

Related constructs

Agency: According to Barker (2005), importance of structure and agency in evolving human behavior is long standing debate in social sciences. Structure is defined as repeated patterned arrangements that limit the available choices. Agency is the capability of human beings to act autonomously and to make their free choices. This standing debate possibly is understood as an issue of socialization against autonomy by defining either human being acts as a free agent or under control of social structure. So, both constructs deal with formation of human behavior; either it is freely chosen or restrained, nothing is concerned with human perceptions that make things real or elusive.

Autonomy: Autonomy is broad term that is widely used in variety of disciplines (Sociology, Politics, Philosophy, Religion and Medicine). The most common stance is autonomy-defined as self-determination, independent thinking, ability to resist social pressure and ability to regulate one's own behavior, within (Solano, 2014). Similarly, the trending definition of 'autonomy' in terms of self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 1995) suggests that autonomy is one of three psychological needs that contribute in development and it enhances adaptive functioning.

Freedom of choice: Sen has argued, the underlying theme of development is that it increases people's freedom of choice. According to Veenhoven, freedom is possibility and opportunity to make

choices. Nevertheless, possibility and opportunity is environmental attribute. However, freedom can be defined in a broader sense as "the possibility for an individual to make choices, typically major life choices" (Brule and Veenhoven, 2014).

Personal freedom: Freedom in almost all the aspects of life is considered to be the personal freedom of an individual, point of views when an individual is free and there are no external deterrents to their actions. The idea of personal freedom is one of the cornerstone of every current democratic society (Dworkin, 1978). Personal freedom distinctly outlines individual's private sphere in which they are free to take their decisions. According to Sen (1999, 2000), human beings capacities are developed with the help of this private sphere.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Sample and recruitment: To select a sample of youth from marginalized (suffering from poor quality of life) zones existing in Punjab Pakistan, multi-stage random sampling technique is employed (Haq *et al.*, 2010) considered as sampling frame). In the light of referred study, one larger zone of Punjab is selected (stage 1), further, two districts (Multan and Bahawalpur) are selected randomly (stage 2). Likewise, three sub-districts (tehsils) of Punjab (Bahawalpur, Bahawalnagar and Jalalpur Peerwala) with least quality of life have been selected randomly (stage 3). Regardless of gender and educational level, twenty (20) eligible respondents were recruited for focus group discussion (stage 4). All the youths belong to 15-24 years of age. Three homogenous focus groups were made from three sub-districts; ratio of participants remained 8:6:6.

Procedure and FGD protocol: According to the guidelines by Stewart and Shamdasani (1990), all the steps in design and use of focus groups have been followed. The problems were prescribed as:

'How you describe the importance of perceived freedom in your life?' and "what do you think; you have satisfactory level of perceived freedom in different domains/areas/fields of life?"

establishing sampling frame. The veteran moderator and observer with 10 years' research experience were selected to conduct the sessions. Persons selected for participation were contacted and asked to participate in a group at 09 a.m. to 02 p.m. at government colleges for boys in respective three sub-districts. As an incentive,

meals were served to them after the session. The necessary arrangements were made 1 day before the sessions conducted. All the recruited participants were briefed about the nature and scope of discussion. They were also given plenty of time to express on the topic. Data were audio and video tapped, along with field notes (memos). On the same day after the session, initial data of moderator and observer were discussed and reported.

Transcription and inductive thematic analysis: Before transcription started, one training session was conducted with all coders to familiarize with defined coding plan and rules for placing themes. Audio and video data was transcribed and counter-checked carefully by panel of trained coders (familiar with the subject matter) to arrive at reliable results. Nonverbal communication, behavioral responses and gestures (as sign-vehicle) were taken care during the whole process of transcription.

Following the guidelines by Braun and Clarke (2006), data were analyzed in terms of themes and sub-themes; all six phases of thematic analysis were taken care. Two judges were engaged to examine the reliability and sources of disagreement; their sole job was to identify and correct the discrepancy. So, that high degree of interrater reliability is maintained.

Ethical concerns: All the participants were recruited voluntarily with their consent and aim of the research was briefed to them. Participation of all respondents was solely for research purpose; their anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning them participant numbers, names of the participants did not get disclosed anywhere. Formal permission to proceed was obtained from ethical review committee.

RESULTS

Theme 1 (importance of freedom): Youth reported perceived freedom is exercise of free will that contributes in healthy life styles. According to them certain level of freedom is important in every walk of life. A respondent stated that:

“I believe freedom or azadi is the part and parcel of life; without it life is like a slave” (2:M:18)
(Participant No: Gender: Age)

Freedom should be given by family and society as it is crucial for life. Youth feels like they are oppressed and under control as a respondent states that:

“I personally feel, certain level of freedom in all life decisions is important” (6:M:20)

Every healthy society, religion and culture allows their dwellers to exercise some kind of freedom but perception or understanding of that freedom varies individual to individual. Importance of freedom granted by religion and parents in decision making is beyond doubt but incongruity between demand and supply makes youth dissatisfied and frustrated. Respondent reported that:

“Freedom is not only important but very essential to get satisfaction from life, otherwise, I personally feel, life is not completing even oppressed and slave like” (15:F:15)

Freedom is very necessary as it makes individual a balanced person but unfortunately, our families, religion and society does not allow girls/women much freedom as compared to boys.

Theme 2 (domain specification)

Sub-theme 1 (personal freedoms): For the youth, freedom is crucial for life but there is discrepancy between parents ‘autonomy given and reception of autonomy by children. Freedom is equally important for everyone; the only difference is of perception. Freedom given by parents, society, culture and religion is important but there is strong desire to change the existing system which exhibit oppression to youth. Youth feels that they are under control and oppression as sometimes parents are over-protective and do not allow them to do according to their own wishful thinking such oppression by parents is disliked by them. One of the respondent stated that:

“If parents give that level of freedom which modern youth demands, life will turn into heaven” (12:M:21)

Traditional parents and societal rules need to re-establish their fixed thought patterns as they are the source of one’s personal freedom. If parents say them to exercise their will in their life decisions, youth would flourish positively.

Sub-theme 2 (freedom for basic rights): Freedom for basic rights is the integral part of one’s life. Youth reported that they are deprived of this basic right, they feel enslaved without it. Respondent wishfully says that:

“I am waiting the day when our parents and elders realize our needs and allow us to decide our life matters” (9:M:15)

Youth feels oppressed and under control of their family members, society and religion as they are unable to

take basic life decisions on their own such as they cannot wear a dress, make a hair style of their own choice, cannot go outside home, use smartphones, interact to their friends, choose leisure activities, etc. This problem is not only faced by girls but also by boys, they do also have to follow the rules set by parents in dress code, outing timings, friendships, etc., respondent helplessly says that:

“I cannot wear clothes of my own choice such as I like t-shirts and short pants but my father hate this” (9:M:15)

According to youth, if religion, society and culture would allow their youngsters a certain healthy level of freedom to both males and females, the youth would turn into healthy beings. Basic rights/fundamental freedoms should be given to youth both the males and females.

Sub-theme 3 (freedom of leisure): Pakistani youth says that they are deprived of leisure activities. Youth complains that firstly there are no such areas where they can go for recreational and leisure activities and areas which are made for such purposes has stagnant water or the families do not allow them to go there. Secondly, they are allowed for very few leisure activities. Society and culture does not allow them to choose any activity freely. Even in leisure activities selection, they depend upon societal, cultural norms and parents’ consent. Dishearten participant says that:

“My family thinks leisure activities are the wastage of time, I should focus on studies only” (4:F:19)

On the contrary, Lapa (2013) leisure activities are the source of increasing productivity of individuals. In Pakistani culture, leisure activities are considered to be only for the boys. In most of the families, girls are not allowed for any outdoors leisure activities such as playing badminton, cricket, etc.

Sub-theme 4 (academic freedom): Freedom plays a vital role in almost all the domains of one’s life. Youth feels deprived of this freedom, even in selection of their subjects. Youth claims that they cannot study and achieve good grades, whilst studying or choosing the education which they do not like. A disturbed and oppressed participant says that:

“My parents especially father is very strict about liberty even he does not like to listen any voice about our liberty. I do believe on importance of liberty in life decisions, Quran-e-Majid also granted us rights but our society condemns it. Even, I was not free to choose my subjects in college; my male family members instructed me to choose subjects. My father is also against university education for girls. Sometimes, I feel oppressed and become disturb for days; my sisters advise me to obey the existing system” (8:F:16)

Liberty in selection of a subject is not only an issue for females but also for the males. They are also oppressed by the families and society. Contrary to this, there are very few families who have given liberty in selection of education and support their children. According to Johnstone and Weaver, everyone must have freedom in choosing the subject and institution of their choice, as it leads to students better outcomes (Folkers, 2013).

Sub-theme 5 (freedom for career selection): Most of the participants mentioned that they feel oppressed in choosing their career. This dilemma is more common in girls as compared to boys. Liberty (freedom) has dynamic role to decide career and education and to live a healthy life but religious parents sometimes oppress their children unnecessarily in the name of religion. Youth is compelled to choose the career which their family decides for them which is very stressful for them. Youth complains as they cannot fulfil their own dreams as they are bound to fulfill those of their parents. Selection of career is relatively more problematic for girls as compared to boys. There is a great discrimination between the two genders and the disheartened participant says that:

“It is very essential to live a balanced life otherwise our life become like a slave. I have a good level of liberty but I feel oppressed when there is restriction to select a career of my choice” (13:F:22)

Youth claims that they should have freedom in selection of career. According to Hanitzsch *et al.* (2010), everyone has its own choice and has right to choose career freely according to his/her interest.

Sub-theme 6 (freedom of choice): Almost all the participants reported that first of all they don’t have freedom to take their life decisions and if they are given freedom, it is again very restricted and limited. They are not completely free to take decisions, they still have to

choose from the limited options offered by the family, culture or societal norm. According to Sen (1988), degree of freedom holds an intrinsic value for individuals. For an instance in case of selecting career and education, there are limited traditional options for girls and boys to choose. Boys are forced to either become an engineer, businessman, pilot or a doctor whereas the same limited options are for the girls, either they choose to become a doctor, nurse or a teacher. Youth protests that they do not have limited options in case of career or education but in all matters of life. They want their families and culture to change, an oppressed individual says:

“Nowadays, needs and demands of the age are keep on changing but our parents did not understand this phenomena. That’s why, they restrict us to enjoy life by their own ways with limited options” (17:M:23)

Youth wants to have many options to choose contrary to their wish the study. Sethi-Iyengar *et al.* (2004) suggests that increase in options leads to utility reduction.

Sub-theme 7 (workability and positive affect): Freedom is considered to be the basic source of satisfaction with life, happiness and work-efficiency. According to most of the Pakistani youth, they are less happy and satisfied with their life as they have no freedom in their lives. They feel themselves slaves of their families, society and culture. Pakistani youth is not satisfied with their life as they lack freedom of choice in almost all aspects of their lives. They wish for freedom to be given to them for the happy life which they dream for. Participants reported that their workability can be improved, if they are given liberty to choose their education, career and are allowed to take their life decisions by themselves. Participant sadly says:

“I have no life, I am just a simple machine whose remote-control is in my families hand, my family takes my all decision, I don’t enjoy my job even its of my father’s choice. Parents screw us to perform according to their old traditions, sometimes, this hurts me and I feel helpless and want to get rid of this system of oppression” (17:M:23)

Contrary to which another participant says:

“I do not know, what freedom is because I have no restrictions by my family to go outside any time even day or night; they all trust me a lot I am happy with the level of freedom granted by my parents” (19:F:21)

Youth wants to have freedom to spend a contented happy productive life.

Sub-theme 8 (political freedom): Political freedom is important but unfortunately, our society does not allow our youth to participate in political activities such as to cast a vote or selecting a leader. Youth feels that certain level of freedom is important in all life decisions, particularly in voting and selecting leader of our own choice. Participant says that:

“It is very good if parents allow their children to exercise their will in their life decisions but actually it is not common in our country to cast a vote of my choice leader” (18:M:18)

Youth protests that they should have freedom in choosing the leader and casting vote to him as it is the right and duty of every Pakistani to think wisely and choose such a leader who has potential to makes their nation a better place to live in instead of blindly following the traditional rules. According to Iyengar and Lepper (2000), freedoms such as political and economic freedoms should be valuable to individuals, even if people do not vote or do not profit from the economic possibilities offered. Similarly, Berlin argued that political freedom is often interpreted as the freedom from unreasonable external constraints on action. Taylor also supported this view and stated that it can also refer to the positive exercise of rights.

Sub-theme 9 (freedom of expression): Youth complains that they do not have the basic human right which is the freedom of expression. Everyone should have the freedom of expression and if it is not shared at least, it should be respected. Participant with suppressed emotions says:

“We being a human must have a liberty to at least express out our feelings we should have right to take stand against anything bad, our voice should not be suppressed by our families, culture and society” (1:F:15)

Youth feels helpless as they cannot give words to their feelings and feel bounded by the traditional rules of their families such as men are not allowed to cry as it’s the symbol of weakness for the society. Females are not allowed to share their views as openly as men can; youth is not allowed to raise voice against any violence or illegal happenings.

Sub-theme 10 (life partner selection): Most of the youth reported that freedom is equally important for everyone

but unfortunately, our society does not allow us to participate in some activities which are solely related to us such as selection of life partner, etc. Even the religion allow us to choose the partner of our choice but still youth feels deprived of this freedom. In an agony, participant says that:

“As a Pakistani girl, I think, desired freedom is not given to youngsters. I always feel embarrassed when I compare myself with my brothers. I always use to ask my parents what is fault as being a girl; I even have no right to select my life partner. When Pakistani youth especially girls see Indian and European girls, they become fascinated by them. Freedom is very necessary that make individual a balanced person; otherwise, we feel worthlessness” (11:F:18)

It is not only the problem with the girls but also with the boys. The male participant reported that:

“It is very good if parents allow their children to exercise their will in their life decisions but actually it is not common in our country even selection of my life partner is totally dependent on the decision of my parents” (18:M:18)

Sub-theme 11 (assertiveness): Where most of the youth says that they feel oppressed by the family, society and religion, there are few people who have freedom and can do whatever they wish to. Participant says:

“I am lucky enough to have kind parents that understand me well and allow not only me but my siblings as well to exercise their own will in all life decisions” (7:F:23)

Yet there is a part of the youth that believes, life is all about freedom, life is not worth living without it and in order to get whatever they wish for, these people cross the boundaries set by the their family, society or culture. Few participants reported that they nag their families for different things till they give up and let them do what they wish to. Rest few of the individuals were found to be passive-aggressive.

Theme 3 (external pressure (family, society, religion and culture)): Youth feels that their freedom is enchained by the external factors such as family, society, culture and religion. Pakistani youth complains that they are restrained to take their life decisions because of their family traditions. They have to follow the rules and norms of their culture and society because anything done beyond those rules are considered to be unlawful. In the

name of religion, youth feels emotionally blackmailed by the society and Freedom is restrained by all these. Most of the youth says that their decisions of life are mostly family, society, religion or cultural bounded. They feel themselves under pressure to balance all these external pressure. Females of the youth feels like the society is the male dominant and they are suppressed by them, unduly. Participant says:

“Freedom given by culture, society and religion is necessary for everybody but male supremacy (external pressure) suppresses women liberty” (3:F:21)

DISCUSSION

Pakistani youth considers freedom as one of the most important right of their life that has importance beyond doubt. Most of the Pakistani youth feels oppressed and under control of parents, family, society, culture and religion in taking their life decisions. Youth claims that personal freedom is equally important for everyone. They should be given freedom to take their life decisions on their own and their families should not be overly protective. Youth has shared that they are deprived of taking decisions even for the matters which are directly linked to them; they feel enslaved as they not even have any right to choose their friends, interact with their friends, choose a dress, use any gadgets, go out of home, etc., without parents' permission. Even selection of the leisure activities depend upon the parents' permission and societies' approval and for most of the families, there should be no freedom for leisure activities as it is the wastage of time and may be injurious. Whereas according to Patry *et al.* (2007) leisure activities are one of the effective means for coping with stress and are a great way for relaxation.

Youth does not only feel oppressed in basic rights but also in those decisions which are directly linked to them and should be decided by them only such as liberty in choosing the subject as its going to be them who have to study that subject. It's not only about studying it as a subject they feel oppressed as there career depends upon that subject, they feel enchained by their families, society and cultural norm are their restrictions leave them with very few and limited options from which they have to choose and suffer the rest of life. Youth demands academic freedom as without it, they are compelled to do what their families wish for whilst fulfilling their families demands their happiness is suppressed and is less satisfied with their life. They do not enjoy their research as it's not of their interest; lack of interest is one of the major causes of poor workability and performance.

According to Barrow (2009), academic freedom is believed to have a good utility for humanity progress. Youth complains that they even do not have right to choose the leader and caste vote to him which is the basic right of every Pakistani as according to Rose (2001) political freedom allows people to express and voice out their opinion which has an ultimate effect on their lives.

Youth is restrained to express out what they feel like or dislike. They lack the freedom of expression and speech, they cannot even select their life partner of their own choice and even such vital decisions are made by the families. According to Hayes (2009), freedom of speech has great importance as without it there would be no freedom of thought which relates to freedom of mind and where there is no freedom of mind there is any freedom at all. Where most of Pakistani youths freedom is being oppressed and they are enslaved, there still are many who are free to choose whatever they wish to they have no societal, cultural, religious and familial chains to bind them. In between these two extremes, there are individuals who assertively get whatever they wish to either through nagging, passive-aggression or simply by violating the defined criteria's of their families. Pakistani youth is found to be under the pressure of multiple external pressures which oppress their freedom in one way or the other these include family, society, culture and religion.

CONCLUSION

As sum, self-perceived freedom is one of integral parts of one's life, without which youth feels enslaved, oppressed and worthless. Self-perceived freedom has its vital importance in all domains of life for Pakistani youth. In the light of above mentioned discussion, it can be inference that youth prioritize the domains of freedom such as personal freedom, freedom of basic rights, freedom in leisure, freedom in academic and career selection, political freedom, freedom of life partner selection and freedom of expression. Importantly as a result of external pressure assertiveness has been developed in youth. Finally, it is evident that self-perceived freedom leads toward positive outcomes like productivity and positive affect.

LIMITATION

Based on the findings of current study, a questionnaire of multidimensional self-perceived freedom has been devised to measure the degree of self-perceived freedom among Pakistani youths that would bridge the existing research gap.

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