

Millennials vs Gen Z – Exploring the Relationship between Religiosity and Masturbatory Guilt

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In Indian society, religion deeply shapes cultural values and attitudes toward sexuality, leading to a complex interplay between traditional beliefs and modern discourse. Masturbation, a natural behaviour, can conflict with religious teachings, resulting in varying degrees of guilt or inner conflict among followers. This study investigates the relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among Millennials and Generation Z in India. Using a correlational, comparative, and quantitative approach with a sample of 190 participants evenly distributed across both generations, the study employed the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS-10) and Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation Scale. Results showed a significant positive correlation between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among Millennials, while for Generation Z, the correlation was positive but not statistically significant. Millennials scored higher on both religiosity and masturbatory guilt compared to Generation Z. These findings underscore the influence of religiosity on masturbatory guilt, especially among Indian Millennials, suggesting further research with diverse sampling techniques to explore these dynamics comprehensively.

Keywords: Religiosity, Masturbatory Guilt, Millennials, Generation Z, Religion

In 1912, at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, Freud stated, *“We are all agreed on one thing – that the subject of masturbation is quite inexhaustible.”* Sigmund Freud famously described masturbation as the first or ‘primal’ addiction. Despite being a common practice, it is still a taboo and people refrain from talking about it publicly. Regardless of gender or personal preferences, the majority of individuals still experience some degree of embarrassment and discomfort when it comes to masturbation, even though the topic of sexuality is somewhat discussed in public nowadays. Castellini et al. (2016) researched to evaluate the prevalence of ego-dystonic masturbation (EM). 352 participants reported guilt associated with masturbation and the results concluded that EM severity was positively associated with higher free-floating and depressive symptoms.

Masturbation, a natural and common behavior, can clash with religious teachings, leading to different degrees of guilt or inner struggle among followers of various faiths. They might seem like strange bedfellows, but sex—the source of human life—is at the core of religious teachings and influences many when it comes to sexual attitudes and behavior. The interpretations of primary religious sources draw a connection between masturbation and such ideas as lust and impurity, which are measured concerning a spiritual elite (Buaban, 2020). Spiritually, masturbation was found to be negatively associated with religion and religiosity. Additionally, it was discovered that, from a theological standpoint, masturbation and pornography directly violate the religious virtue of chastity, which weakens one’s resolve to pursue a spiritual life and their ability to pray (Vitz & Williams, 2023). In the

Indian subcontinent, the 'masturbatory guilt' is in general seen as part of the Dhat syndrome (Das & Dutt, 2021; Aneja et al., 2015).

Religion is defined as a range of social-cultural systems, including designated behaviors and practices, morals, beliefs, worldviews, texts, sanctified places, prophecies, ethics, or organizations, that generally relate humanity to supernatural, transcendental, and spiritual elements. Any religion is manifested through the religiosity of the people following it. In simple words, 'religiosity' is said to be the degree to which an individual is inclined towards their religion. Religiosity has been a core aspect of Indian society and cultural values. India's rich tapestry of religions, including Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, all have strong cultural and social influences. It is estimated that nearly nine in ten Indian adults say religion was very important to their family while growing up, with a similar number reporting that it remains very important in their own lives (Pew Research Center, 2021). However, it has also been revealed through previous research that there's a growing gap in religiosity between generations in developed nations, with younger people showing less interest in formal religious affiliation and practices than their parents and grandparents (Kramer et al., 2022).

There has been considerable amount of research focusing on exploring the relationship between masturbatory guilt or sex practices and religiousness. Younis et al. (2018) carried out research intending to provide information about the frequency of masturbation in a sample of 286 Egyptian women and the views of women about it. The results revealed that masturbation was considered 'haram' (prohibited) by 39.2% of participants and 77.5% said it caused them to feel guilty. It has also been discovered that higher abstinence from masturbation is linked to poorer faith in science and a perceived

impact of the influence of conservatism, religiosity, and masturbation (Zimmer & Imhoff, 2020).

In contemporary society, discussions surrounding sexuality intersect with religious beliefs, presenting a complex landscape that shapes individual attitudes and behaviors. Within this context, religiosity stands as a multifaceted construct encompassing beliefs, practices, and the significance of religion in one's life. Among the evolving generations of Millennials and Generation Z (Gen Z), the interplay between religiosity and sexual practices, particularly concerning masturbation, remains a pertinent yet underexplored area of study. Considering the heavy influence of religious teachings, the present study focused on the guilt related to sexual behavior of self-stimulation as a result of religiosity in Indian population. This research also attempts to discover generational differences between millennials and Generation Z in context of their religiosity and sexual practice of self-stimulation.

Keeping this evidence in mind, the present study was planned with following objectives:

1. To assess the relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among millennials.
2. To examine the relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among generation Z.
3. To compare the difference of religiosity and masturbatory guilt between millennials and generation Z.

Aim

To study the nuanced relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among Millennials and Gen Z cohorts.

Hypotheses

- H1 There will be a significant positive correlation between religiosity and masturbatory guilt in millennials.

- H2 There will be no significant relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt in Generation Z.
- H3 There will be a significant difference of religiosity and masturbatory guilt between millennials and Generation Z.

Method

Sample

The total number of participants in the present study were 190, comprising 91 males and 98 females. One respondent also chose the category of “other” for their gender. All the participants were divided equally among two generational cohorts of Millennials (born between 1981 - 1996) and Gen Z (born between 1997 - 2012), residing in India. The technique utilized was non-probability sampling. Under non-probability, purposive and convenience sampling were employed.

Tools

The centrality of Religiosity Scale—10: Developed by Huber and Huber in 2012, the *Centrality of Religiosity Scale (CRS)* is a measure of the centrality, importance or salience of religious meanings in personality. The present study utilized CRS-10, that is, a 10-item version of this questionnaire. It measures religiosity on five dimensions – intellectual dimension, public practice, private practice, ideology, and religious experience. In eight studies, reliabilities of the individual dimensions ranged from 0.89 to 0.94 for the whole CRS-10.

Negative Attitudes Toward Masturbation: Developed by Abramson & Mosher in 1975, this inventory is a 30-item (10 of which have reversed scoring), 5-point Likert-type scale anchored by “not at all true for me” to “extremely true for me”. It is a psychometric instrument designed to measure individuals’ beliefs, feelings, and attitudes regarding masturbation in a negative light. A corrected split-half reliability of .75 was reported for the

original sample. A Cronbach alpha of .94 was found for a sample of 186 college women (Mosher & Vonderheide, 1985).

Procedure

After conceptualization of the research problem, a questionnaire was created in Google Docs. The questionnaire consisted of a consent form, demographic details, and two established scales. The participants were also informed about their basic rights in the beginning of the form, such as confidentiality of data and the right to withdraw participation at any time during the course of research.

Results

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	Generation	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Religiosity	GenZ	95	3.4600	.86693	.08895
	Millennials	95	3.9232	.72368	.07425
Masturbatory Guilt	GenZ	95	65.3895	18.05623	1.85253
	Millennials	95	89.3368	26.45012	2.71372

Table 2. Correlation between Religiosity & Masturbatory Guilt among Millennials

		Religiosity	Masturbatory Guilt
Religiosity	Pearson Correlation	1	.651**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	95	95
Masturbatory Guilt	Pearson Correlation	.651**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	95	95

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

Table 3. Correlation between Religiosity & Masturbatory Guilt among Gen Z

		Religiosity	Masturbatory Guilt
Religiosity	Pearson Correlation	1	.098
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.344
	N	95	95
Masturbatory Guilt	Pearson Correlation	.098	1

Table 4. Difference of Religiosity and Masturbatory Guilt between Millennials and Gen Z

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df (2-tailed)	Sig. Difference	Mean Difference	Std. Error
Religiosity	Equal variances assumed	2.797	.096	-3.997	188	.000	-.46316	.11586
	Equal variances not assumed			-3.997	182.184	.000	-.46316	3.28575
Masturbatory Guilt	Equal variances assumed	32.695	.000	-7.288	188	.000	-23.94737	3.28575
	Equal variances not assumed			-7.288	165.979	.000	-23.94737	3.28575

Discussion

Indian society is shaped majorly by its generations' cultures and religious beliefs. The interconnection of generations and the influence of religious values form a dynamic tapestry that weaves through the fabric of society, shaping individuals' beliefs, behaviors, and cultural norms across time. As younger generations come of age, they engage with inherited religious traditions in dialogue with contemporary realities, renegotiating and reinterpreting these values to align with their own identities and worldviews. Despite the persistent conflicts between world's religions, there is one topic on which all religions of the world seem to find common ground: masturbation. Many of these religions have long held the belief that masturbation is morally wrong, sinful, and harmful.

Masturbation is today seen as a normal, healthy sexual behavior that is enjoyable, rewarding, acceptable, and safe—a far cry from its previous stigma as a pervert and an

indication of a mental health issue. However, it is admonished culturally and almost all religions prohibit masturbation and consider it an act of immorality. People who indulge in the act of masturbation have associated guilt feelings, depending on their level of belief/faith in the cultural belief system.

The present study aimed to investigate the relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among millennials and Gen Z cohorts in Indian population. Table 1 indicates the descriptive statistics of the data showing mean and standard deviation on both variables for the two generations. Results of the study revealed a statistically significant and positive correlation between religiosity and masturbatory guilt with a correlational value of 0.651. Results of few studies are in support of the current result; Winkel (2020) examined the association of Christian religiousness with masturbatory guilt in young adults (12 – 24 years). The results concluded that religiosity correlates with heightened feelings of guilt regarding

masturbation. This connection appears to stem from heightened restrictive attitudes toward sexual conduct within one's gender among religious youth. Woo et al. (2012) looked at how feelings of guilt about sex are connected to religious beliefs and sexual desire in women from Europe and East Asia. Their study suggests that the more strongly a woman identifies with her religion, the more she experiences sex guilt, regardless of her cultural background.

On the other hand, the findings for Generation Z suggested a positive but insignificant relationship between religiosity and masturbatory guilt with a correlational value of 0.098. Research has suggested that there's a widening difference in religious beliefs between age groups. Young adults tend to be less interested in joining organized religions or following traditional religious practices compared to older generations (Kramer et al., 2022).

Lastly, result of the t-test reveals a significant difference in the levels of religiosity as well as masturbatory guilt in the two generational cohorts of millennials and Gen-Z. Millennials ($M = 3.92$, $SD = 0.72$) show a higher level of religiosity, $t(188) = -3.997$, $p < .001$, than Gen Z cohort ($M = 3.46$, $SD = 0.86$). The results of the present study also revealed a significant generational difference in masturbatory guilt, $t(165.979) = -7.288$, $p < .001$, wherein millennials ($M = 89.33$, $SD = 26.45$) experience a greater level of guilt associated with masturbation than Gen Z ($M = 65.38$, $SD = 18.05$). Previous research has shown that young generation are less participate to religious activities in compare to old generations probably because young ones are unlikely to feel particularly mortal or close to death (Murat, 2017). Additionally, research has also shown that spiritually, there exists a negative correlation between masturbation and religion and religiosity (Vitz & Williams, 2023).

In India, the concept of religion is highly influential whereas sexual engagement, like masturbation, is still a taboo. However, there is an urgent need to delve deeper into the concepts of religiosity and masturbatory guilt within the Indian population to understand the complex interplay between cultural norms, religious beliefs, and individual sexual behavior. The present study's findings, if replicated with robust methods, could highlight the need for comprehensive sex education in India. This education should address masturbation as a normal and healthy aspect of human sexuality, regardless of religious beliefs. The study might open doors for further research exploring the link between masturbatory guilt, religiosity, and mental health issues like anxiety or depression in the Indian context.

Conclusion

The current study compared religiosity and masturbatory guilt between Gen Z and Millennials, with 190 participants equally divided into these cohorts. Results showed a significant positive correlation between religiosity and masturbatory guilt among Millennials, indicating higher religiosity is linked to greater guilt. However, Gen Z displayed a positive but insignificant correlation. This aligns with trends suggesting reduced religiosity among younger generations. Differences in religiosity and guilt were significant between the two groups, supporting all study hypotheses. The findings stress the need for further research using robust sampling methods to explore this issue across India's diverse population, potentially informing culturally sensitive interventions.

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