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Religiosity of Muslim girls, participation in extracurricular activities and its effects on their educational aspiration: A moderated mediation model

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Abstract: The present study aims to determine whether girls' participation in extracurricular activities at schools mediates the relationship between religiosity and their educational aspirations, and if so, how this effect varies depending on parental education. Altogether, 312 Muslim female students in Grades 9 and 10 from eight secondary schools in Bangladesh were interviewed. As part of the study, an inferential test of the conditional indirect effect of the independent variable at specified moderator values on the dependent variable was conducted using the Hayes' percentile approach. Analyses revealed that girls' religiosity has an indirect and significant adverse effect on their educational aspirations through their participation in extracurricular activities and the relationship, significantly moderated by the level of their parents' education.

Keywords: religiosity, extracurricular activities, mediation, educational aspirations

Religiozita muslimských dívek, účast na mimoškolních aktivitách a její dopady na vzdělávací aspiraci: Model zprostředkované mediace

Abstrakt: Cílem této studie je zjistit, zda účast dívek na mimoškolních aktivitách ve školách zprostředkovává vztah mezi religiozitou a jejich vzdělávacími aspiracemi, a pokud ano, jak se tento efekt liší v závislosti na vzdělání rodičů. Celkem bylo dotazováno 312 muslimských studentek v 9. a 10. ročníku z osmi základních škol druhého stupně v Bangladéši. V rámci studie byl proveden inferenční test podmíněného nepřímého účinku nezávislé proměnné při specifikovaných hodnotách moderátoru na závisle proměnnou pomocí Hayesova percentilového přístupu. Analýzy odhalily, že religiozita dívek má nepřímý a významný nepříznivý vliv na jejich vzdělávací aspirace prostřednictvím účasti na mimoškolních aktivitách a partnerských vztazích, významně zmírněných úrovní vzdělání jejich rodičů.

Klíčová slova: religiozita, mimoškolní aktivity, mediace, vzdělávací aspirace

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1 Introduction

Bangladesh is a developing country where over 90.4% of the population adheres to the Islamic religion (Pew Research Center, 2011) and demonstrates Muslim culture. While the country has managed to improve gender inequality in primary and secondary school enrolment, inequality remains high at the tertiary level of education. To ascertain the underlying causes of low female enrolment in higher education, the present study examines the aspirations of girls enrolled in secondary-level education in Bangladesh.

Bangladeshi schools offer a variety of extracurricular activities. Most of them can generally be divided into two groups: sports and fine arts. Although some female students eventually participate in extracurricular in-school activities in this country, others attend few or none. In this regard, former research has indicated that the most likely reason for low participation in extracurricular activities is the students' Low Socioeconomic Status (SES), given the financial costs involved (Simpkins et al., 2005). However, the present study argues that low SES does not explain low or zero participation in extracurricular activities, partly because school-related extracurricular activities are free for all students in Bangladesh. Considering these circumstances, the present study emphasises the Integrative Model (Garcia Coll et al., 1996), which identifies the underlying causes of non-participation in extracurricular activities, in addition to socioeconomic status. The authors of the Integrative Model assume that cultural values directly impact girls' participation in extracurricular activities. Based on the proceeding, the present study considers the Islamic cultural values in Bangladesh. The cultural norms of the Islamic religion prohibit certain basic requirements of extracurricular activities for adult females, such as wearing short skirts, tight or see-through clothing, and swimsuits, as well as exposing parts of the female body that are considered sexually explicit. Therefore, if the cultural values of Islam do not allow for particular requirements for women's extracurricular activities, religious-minded girls deem extracurricular activities unacceptable. Thus, the main objective of this study is to examine whether there is a relationship between the religiosity of Muslim girls and their participation in extracurricular in-school activities and, if so, how this relationship effects their educational aspirations. The present study suggests that girls' involvement in extracurricular in-school activities depends on their level of religiosity, with more devout girls likely to not participate in extracurricular activities and consequently having lower educational aspirations.

1.1 Purpose of the Present Study

This study has pursued the following objectives;

- i) To determine whether there is any association between the girls' religiosity and their participation rate in extracurricular in-school activities,
- ii) To examine the effect of girls' participation in extracurricular activities their educational aspirations, and
- iii) To clarify how the relationship between girls' religiosity and their participation in extracurricular in-schools activities differ by parental education level.

2 Theoretical Background

2.1 Girls' religiosity and participation in extracurricular activities

Identifying how Muslim culture constrains girls in extracurricular activities is the only way to understand the association between girls' religiosity and participation in these activities. This is because Muslim culture is governed by a living code or set of ethics ascribed by God in the Holy Quran (the religious text of Islam). These ethics or rules define how Muslims carry out every activity in their

lives (Benn, 1996). In addition, Islamic laws and cultural practices outline some sensible rules, especially for women, that affect different stages of their lives, including the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. In this regard, Carrington and Williams (1988) showed that Islamic cultural values may limit the participation of Muslim girls in extracurricular activities worldwide. It has been recognised that Muslim girls face significant challenges than Muslim boys due to religious and cultural traditions where, for example, strict Islamic codes control and restrict girls' access to physical education in schools. Fleming (1991) also suggests that Asian Muslim girls value sports and physical education less. Research on Islamic references indicates that culture and traditions hinder Muslim girls from participating in sporting activities. In Senegal, for example, it is socially and culturally forbidden for Muslim women to participate in sports (Hewett, 2010).

2.2 Extracurricular activities and educational aspirations

Several empirical studies have suggested that extracurricular in-school activities allow students to integrate with others, which is very important in shaping their aspirations. In this regard, educational sociologists have developed a standard peer effect model and determined that peer groups are essential in shaping adolescents' aspirations and educational decisions. The theory suggests that there are three dimensions to extracurricular activities that promote concurrent and new friendships among students in school. First, ongoing contact in a particular activity allows students to spend time with each other, encouraging school friendship (Feld, 1981). Second, teamwork among students promotes relationship building (Larson, 2000). Third, extracurricular activities bring together students with similar interests, increasing the likelihood of social networking among students (Fredricks et al., 2004), leading to students' better academic performance and encouraging them to continue their education beyond high school (Smith & Gottheil, 2008).

2.3 Parental education, religiosity and extracurricular activities

Nelson (1991) observed that people with lower SES were associated with more religious practices and experiences than those with higher SES. Ellison and Gay (1990) showed that low SES people sought psychological benefits from religiosity and tended to be more religious in general. In the case of education, many researchers have determined an inverse relationship between an individual's level of education and religiosity. For example, Iannaccone (1992) identified an overall negative association between education and religious participation, with more educated individuals tending to be less religious. In fact, girls whose parents have achieved higher education tend to display modern attitudes.

3 Hypotheses

The present study seeks to test the hypothetical model outlined in Figure 1.

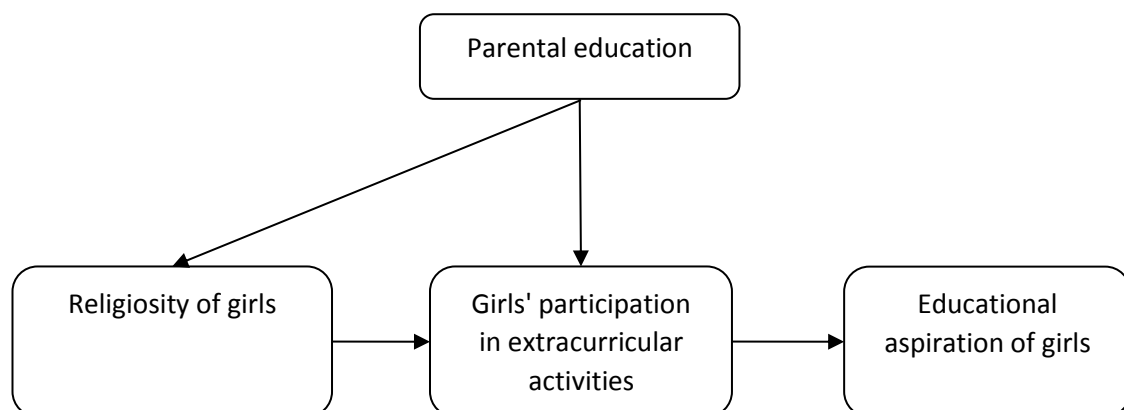


Figure 1 Hypothetical model on the relationships between girls' religiosity, parental education, participation in extracurricular activities, and educational aspirations

Hypothesis 1. According to the hypothetical model (Figure 1), the present study proposes that girls' religiosity indirectly affects their educational aspirations, which is mediated by their participation in extracurricular activities. Regarding the impact of the religiosity of girls on their involvement in extracurricular activities, the present study assumes that as girls' religiosity increases, their participation in extracurricular activities decreases.

Hypothesis 2. The relationship between girls' religiosity and participation in extracurricular activities is moderated by their parental education, assuming that as parental education levels increase, girls' participation in extracurricular activities also grows.

Hypothesis 3. The indirect effect of girls' religiosity on educational aspirations depends on the function of parental education. In other words, as the level of parental education increases, the religiosity of girls may decrease, and the less religiously-minded girls tend to participate more in extracurricular in-school activities, consequently increasing their educational aspirations. Thus, if the level of parental education increases, the indirect effect of religiosity on educational aspirations decreases.

4 Methods

4.1 Participants and data collection procedure

The present study draws on a survey conducted in one of the urban zones of Pirgonj Upazila of Rangpur District in Bangladesh in March 2022, using in-person interviews with structured questionnaires. The eight secondary schools of Pirgonj were selected randomly. The study targeted Muslim female students in Grades 9 and 10 and received responses from 312 girls, accounting for 76.47% of the total 405 female students.

4.2 Measurement of the variables

The types and characteristics of variables applied in this study are described in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Measures and variables

Dependent variable	Descriptions
Educational aspirations	Girls were asked, "How far would you like to go in education?" (circle only one of the options below). 1 = less than high school graduation, 2 = high school education only, 3 = less than two years of college, vocational or business school, 4 = two or more years of college, including a two-year degree, 5 = Bachelor's degree, 6 = Master's degree or equivalent, and 7 = PhD, MD or another professional degree.
Independent variables	
Girls' participation in extracurricular activities	Participation in extracurricular activities was quantified by counting the frequency of a student's participation in extracurricular activities at school in the past three months and by using information from the student's school records. Scores were measured using a 5-point scale where 1 indicated those who had very low participation (less than ten times), and 5 those who had very high participation (more than 40 times).
Religiosity	Religiosity was assessed by the frequency of prayers, as prayer is defined as a person's communication with divine and spiritual entities. In this regard, we asked the girls how often they prayed weekly. It is

essential to mention that religious Muslims pray five times a day. A five-point scale was used for the prayer score, with 1 indicating very low religiosity (praying less than five times a week) and 5 denoting very high religiosity (praying more than 35 times a week).

Parental education	Parental education was ascertained by the total number of years the parents spent in school.
Control variables	
Parental involvement in school	Based on school records, how often have parents contacted the school in the last year?
Parental income	Parental monthly income.
Academic achievement	Academic achievements were assessed based on average grades in the most recent examination.

4.3 Analytic strategy

Kenny et al. (1998) state that mediation is supported when the following conditions are met: (i) the independent variable significantly predicts the dependent variable ($X \rightarrow Y$); (ii) the independent variable predicts the mediator ($X \rightarrow M$); (iii) the mediator significantly predicts the dependent variable while controlling the independent variable ($M | X \rightarrow Y$); whereas (iv) the independent variable no longer predicts the dependent variable when controlling the mediator ($X | M \rightarrow Y$). The present study demonstrates these approaches using the bootstrap re-sampling method described by Preacher and Hayes (2008), specifically the Hayes' PROCESS 2013 with SPSS (www.afhayes.com). The present study assessed the indirect effect of girls' religiosity on their educational aspirations using Hayes' PROCESS model 4 method with SPSS software to test Hypothesis 1. The study generated a 95% bootstrap confidence interval (CI) of the indirect effect predictor on the outcome through our potential mediator (participation in extracurricular activities), using 5,000 bootstrap re-samples. The Sobel (1982) test estimate of the indirect effect was also established using this procedure to test the significance of the indirect effect.

In the present study, moderated mediation was assessed by examining four conditions (Chan et al., 2008): (i) a significant direct effect of the independent on the dependent variable ($X \rightarrow Y$); (ii) a significant interaction between the independent variable and the proposed moderator on the expected dependent variable; (iii) a significant direct effect of the mediator on the dependent variable ($M \rightarrow Y$); and (iv) various conditional indirect effects of the independent variable (X) on the dependent variable (Y) via the mediator according to the moderator function (W). The last condition is the core of moderated mediation; if the conditional indirect effect changes significantly as a function of the moderator (values), the moderated mediation may have occurred, i.e., the indirect effect has been moderated (Edwards & Lambert, 2007).

When demonstrating the indirect effects of an independent variable on a dependent variable through a mediator, researchers usually apply a mean, one standard deviation above the mean, and one standard deviation below the mean, which are defined as the moderate, relatively high, and relatively low values of the moderator, respectively. In this context, Hayes et al. (2012) argue that there is no guarantee that all three values will fit within the range of the data, if the moderator distribution is skewed, one or more of them could be a poor representation of the moderate, low or high values. In this regard, the authors also suggest that comparing per moderator (e.g., low, moderate or high values) of specific indirect effects is unnecessary if the indirect effect was moderated based on an estimate of the moderated mediation index. Hayes (2012) recommends using the 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles of the moderator to estimate the independent variable's conditional effects on the dependent variable under these circumstances. The values of the moderator should always be within

the range of the data. They can be interpreted as very low, low, moderate, high, and very high, respectively, which are more interpretable. Therefore, in this study, an inferential test of the conditional indirect effect at the specified moderator values was conducted based on Hayes' (model 7) percentile approach using PROCESS with SPSS software. Another prominent feature of the PROCESS procedure is that it estimates a moderated mediation index with the acceptance of a bootstrap confidence interval, which refers to an inferential test as to whether the indirect effect is linearly dependent on the moderator (Hayes, 2012).

5 Results

Table 2 demonstrates the relationships between the variables included in the models. Before testing the model, it is necessary to establish a significant correlation between the study variables under study to perform mediating and moderating regression analysis (Baron & Kenny, 1986; Holmbeck, 1997).

Table 2

Correlation metrics of study variables

Variables	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.
1. Parental income	-					
2. Parental involvement in school	.78*	-				
3. Higher Grade Point (HGP)	.22**	.53**	-			
4. Girls' religiosity	-.41**	-.62**	-.23**	-		
5. Participation in extra. activities	.52**	.37**	.13**	-.73**	-	
6. Parental education	.18**	.44**	.49**	-.31**	.34**	-
7. Girls' educational aspirations	.44**	.56**	.11**	-.48**	.57**	.64**

Notes: * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

When examining the correlations, girls' religiosity was negatively and significantly correlated with participation in extracurricular activities ($r = -.73, p < .01$), socioeconomic status ($r = -.31, p < .01$), and educational aspirations ($r = -.48, p < .01$). The above indicated results suggest that more religiously-inclined girls were less likely to participate in extracurricular activities, had lower SES, and lower educational aspirations. The results also demonstrate that girls' participation in extracurricular activities was positively and significantly correlated with SES ($r = .34, p < .01$), and educational aspirations ($r = .57, p < .01$); on the other hand, girls with a higher level of SES participated more in extracurricular activities and had higher educational aspirations. Parental socioeconomic status (SES) was positively and significantly correlated with girls' participation in extracurricular activities ($r = .34, p < .01$) and their educational aspirations ($r = .57, p < .01$). Girls with higher SES were also more likely to participate in extracurricular activities and to have higher aspirations for their education. Parental socioeconomic status also positively and significantly correlated with girls' educational aspirations ($r = .64, p < .01$). Thus, all relationships between the variables examined were significant and followed the expected direction.

5.1 Tests of mediation

To test Hypothesis 1, the researcher ran a simple mediation model and the results, presented in Table 3, show that girls' religiosity was negatively and (statistically) significantly related to educational aspirations ($B = -.13, t = 9.72, p < .001$). The result revealed that more religiously-inclined girls were less likely to aspire to higher levels of education. The relationship between girls' religiosity and their involvement in extracurricular activities was also negatively significant ($B = -.36, t = 19.49, p < .001$).

Table 3
Results for simple mediation model ($n = 312$)

Model	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Z</i>	<i>p</i>	Bootstrap 95% CI
$X \rightarrow Y$	-.13	.01	9.72		.00	[-.15, -.10]
$X \rightarrow M$	-.36	.02	19.49		.00	[-.40, -.33]
($M X \rightarrow Y$)	.26	.04	7.36		.00	[-.19, -.33]
($X M \rightarrow Y$)	-.03	.02	1.85		.07	[-.07, .00]
Indirect effect (IE)	-.10	.01		-6.88	.00	[-.13, -.07]

Notes: X = Religiosity, M = Participation in extracurricular activities (PE), Y = Educational aspiration; ($M|X \rightarrow Y$) = aspiration regressed on PE controlling for religiosity and ($X|M \rightarrow Y$) = aspiration regressed on religiosity controlling for PE. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000, Confidence intervals (CI) = 95.00.

This result implies that more religiously-inclined girls were less likely to participate in extracurricular in-school activities. The mediator result (participation in extracurricular activities – PE) demonstrates that PE was significantly positively associated with girls' educational aspiration, controlled for girls' religiosity ($B = .26, t = 7.36, p < .001$), suggesting that participation in extracurricular activities increased girls' educational aspirations. Finally, the present study determined that the influence of girls' religiosity on their educational ambitions was statistically insignificant, controlling for the mediator (PE) ($B = -.03, t = 1.85, p < .073$). The indirect effect of girls' religiosity on educational aspirations was also examined. In this regard, the effect size was $-.10$ with a 95% confidence interval not including zero; i.e., the effect was significantly higher than zero at $\alpha = .05$. The author performed a Sobel test and determined that there was a complete mediation in the model ($Z = -6.88, p = .001$). Hypothesis 1 was, therefore, supported in this model.

5.2 Tests of moderated mediation

In this study, the four conditions mentioned above were tested to assess moderated mediation. Conditions 1 (significant direct effect of the independent on the dependent variable) and 3 (significant direct effect of the mediator on the dependent variable) were already confirmed by the analysis in the previous section (Table 3). To test Condition 2, the study focused on the predictor and moderator variables prior to creating the conditions to test for interaction effects (Aiken & West, 1991). Hypothesis 2 predicted that the relationship between girls' religiosity and their participation in extracurricular activities would be moderated by their parents' level of education. As shown in Table 4, the interaction of girls' religiosity and parental education was significantly related to the girls' participation in extracurricular activities ($B = -.03, t = 3.85, p < .001$) with a 95% confidence interval not including zero. The study presents the graph of that interaction in Figure 2, where the parental education score was one standard deviation below and above the mean. Figure 2 shows that girls whose parents had a higher level of education participated more in extracurricular activities than girls whose parents achieved only a low level of education. Moreover, Figure 2 indicates that girls' participation in extracurricular activities decreased with both low and high parental education levels, provided that the girls are more religious-minded. This tendency suggests that the relationship between girls' religiosity and their participation in extracurricular activities weakens in the case of high religiosity. Therefore, both Hypothesis 2 and Condition 2 were confirmed for the moderated mediation assessment based on the analyses conducted.

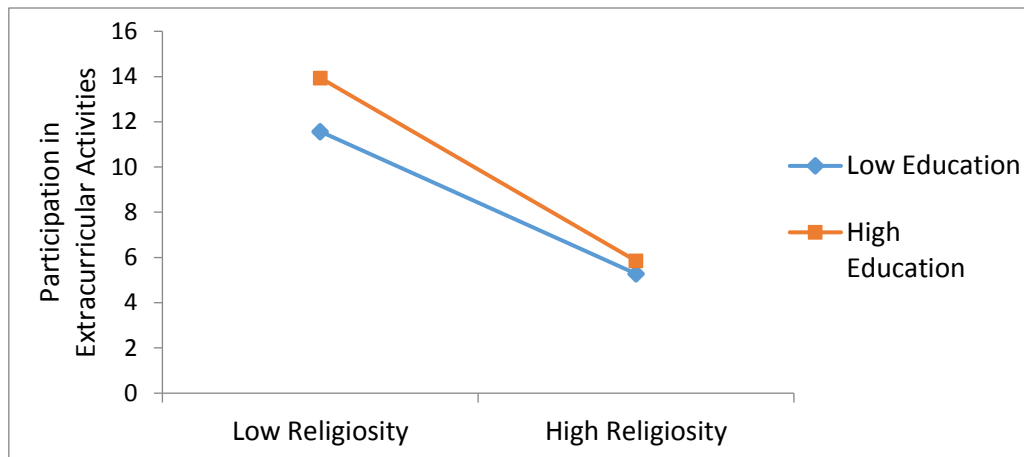


Figure 2 Effect of parental education on the relationship between girls' religiosity and their participation in extracurricular activities

The study also examined Condition 4, which requires the conditional indirect effect of the independent variable on the dependent variable that varies by the moderator function. For its demonstration, the conditional indirect effect of girls' religiosity on their educational aspirations through participation in extracurricular activities was estimated according to the stated value of parental education.

Table 4

Results for moderated mediation model ($n = 322$)

Model tested	<i>B</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Bootstrap 95% <i>CI</i>
$X \rightarrow M$	-.36	.02	18.61	.00	[-.39, -.32]
$W \rightarrow M$.19	.08	2.48	.01	[.04, .34]
$X*W \rightarrow M$	-.03	.01	3.85	.00	[-.05, -.01]
Conditional indirect effect of X on Y at specified values of moderator					
Values of moderator (SES)	<i>Effect</i>	<i>SE (Boot)</i>			Bootstrap 95% <i>CI</i>
- 3.20	-.07	.01			[-.09, -.05]
- .2.20	-.08	.01			[-.10, -.05]
- .20	-.09	.01			[-.12, -.07]
1.80	-.11	.02			[-.14, -.08]
2.80	-.14	.02			[-.15, .00]
Index of moderated mediation	-.08	.02			[-.13, .07]

Notes: X = Religiosity, M = Participation in extracurricular activities (PE), Y = Educational aspiration, W = Parental education. Values for moderators are 10th, 25th, 50th, 75th, and 90th percentiles. Bootstrap sample size = 5,000, Confidence intervals (CI) = 95.00.

The conditional indirect effect results presented in Table 4 show that the indirect effect of the girls' religiosity on their educational aspirations through participation in extracurricular activities was consistently negative and declined as the moderator (parental education) values increased. In other words, the results reveal that the indirect effect of girls' religiosity through extr-curricular participation decreased with increasing parental education. A 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the conditional indirect effect was entirely above zero, except for the very high (value) level of parental education (90th percentile = 2.80). In contrast, the indirect effect did not differ from zero as the bootstrap confidence interval fluctuated around zero (-.15 to .00). This result implies that participation in extracurricular activities mediated the effect of religiosity on the educational aspirations of girls except for those

whose parents achieved a very high level of education as the very high level of parental education significantly attenuated the effect of religiosity on girls' participation in extracurricular activities. PROCESS also produced the moderated mediation index. The result in Table 4 demonstrate that the moderated mediation index was $-.08$. The 95% bootstrap confidence interval for the moderated mediation index was $-.13$ to $.07$, not including zero, providing further evidence of moderation of the indirect effect.

5 Discussion

This study aimed to test a mediation model demonstrating the relationship between girls' religiosity and their educational aspirations mediated by their participation in extracurricular activities. The model results indicate that girls' religiosity indirectly negatively affects their educational aspirations through extracurricular activities. This outcome implies that as girls' religiosity increases, their educational ambitions decrease. According to the moderation model result, a high level of parental education attenuates the effect of religiosity on girls' participation in extracurricular activities. In turn, low parental education deduces girls' involvement in extracurricular activities.

Theoretically, parental education correlates negatively with religiosity. Parents with low education tend to be highly religious, which may discourage girls from participating in extracurricular activities. In fact, the low participation of girls in extracurricular activities caused by the low level of parental education can be explained by two approaches: transfer/transmission and control. From the perspective of the transfer approach, girls tend to voluntarily avoid extracurricular activities and display negative attitudes toward such activities as a result of the negative attitudes toward participation in extracurricular activities of their religiously-minded parents. The reason being that negative parental attitudes are transmitted to daughters who tend to behave in line with parental beliefs and behavioural patterns (Dixon et al., 2008). Parents act as active agents, and children are passive recipients of parental influence, with beliefs, values, and practices being transferred from parents to children (Maccoby, 2003). Focusing specifically on religiosity, Potvin and Sloane (1985) observe that adolescents of parents who regularly engage in religious practices are more likely to become religious themselves over time than adolescents whose parents rarely engage in spiritual practices. Thus, girls with religious parents are more likely to become religious-minded themselves and are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities at school. Therefore, girls who participate less in extracurricular in-school activities also display a lower level of educational aspiration in their minds.

In applying the controlled approach, religiously observant parents tend to control their children's autonomy and may exercise more control over adolescent girls than boys based on their religious sentiments. In addition, as Islamic cultural values do not condone some of the requirements of extracurricular activities for women, religiously observant parents limit the autonomy of their daughters' participation in extracurricular activities because of their conservative stance.

Therefore, girls who do not participate in extracurricular activities at schools or participate less have fewer opportunities to integrate with others, which is fundamental to shaping educational aspirations. Many studies have demonstrated that peer groups are crucial in shaping adolescents' aspirations and educational choices. Indeed, extracurricular activities increase the likelihood of social networking among students, leading to better academic performance and encouraging students to continue their education beyond high school (Smith & Gottheil, 2008). Research has also examined that students' participation in extracurricular activities at school reduces dropout rate. Many empirical studies have demonstrated that students not involved in extracurricular in-school activities perform poorly and experience a lack of adjustment to the school environment. Therefore, girls who do not participate in extracurricular in-school activities or participate to a lesser extent may underperform and suffer from poor school adjustment. As a result, they are more prone to the risk of dropping out of school rather than pursuing higher education.

6 Conclusion

In this study, a moderated mediation model has been developed and tested to explain how religiosity hinders girls' educational aspirations and limits their higher education attainment in Bangladesh. The results have confirmed that higher religiosity discourages girls from participating in extracurricular activities if such activities do not conform to the ethics of the Islamic religion. Lower participation in extracurricular activities leads to poorer academic performance, resulting in lower educational aspirations of the girls. The results have also shown that girls with highly educated parents participate more in extracurricular activities than girls with low parental education. Therefore, girls from families with low socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be excluded from the benefits of extracurricular activities due to their religiosity and parents, resulting in their lower educational attainment. As a result, the rate of achieving a higher education is increasing, particularly for girls from relatively high socioeconomic backgrounds. Under these circumstances, we recommend that highly religious parents support their daughters by counselling them on the benefits of extracurricular activities. Finally, it should be mentioned that this study was conducted using a relatively small sample size. The methods applied in this study may provide guidance for future studies examining the issue of educational aspirations using larger sample areas.

Girls' religiosity has an indirect and significant adverse effect on their educational aspirations.

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