A SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY OF *PIRI-MURIDI*

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Abstract. *Piri-Muridi* is a socio-psychological phenomenon that is deeply rooted in our region. The current study is an endeavor to explore the various reasons that compel people to visit *Pirs* (holy men) with special socio-psychological perspective within Pakistani society. To accomplish this objective, 431 participants were recruited from various areas of the country. Individuals belonged to different educational backgrounds and had diverse professional statuses. The participation of men was (n = 218) and that of women was (n = 195). Age of participants ranged from 18 to 73 years (M = 30.38, SD = 10.74). It was found by the study that participants visit *Pirs* for learning and acquiring guidance (33.41%), also for the clarification of everyday life problems (29.78%). In the category of learning and guidance, 42.13% participants stated that it is the attainment of religious education that people acquire from *Pirs*. 38.74% reported that people visit *Pirs* for getting spiritual education. While 14.77% participants reported that it is the need to gain worldly education and less than 2% people reported that it is not the attainment of education or guidance that people seek from *Pirs,* rather it is black magic that people learn to harm others. Among the category of clarification of problems, the highest frequency was reported for curing of spiritual problems (54.47%) followed by social problems (33.65%), economic problems (32.44%), psychological problems (29.78%) and health related problems (28.08%) respectively. Interview reporting by *Murids* (n =5), strong believers (n =5), situational believers (n = 5), and non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* (n =5) were also given. The present study is useful for making the theoretical foundations for future studies. Moreover, future researchers should utilize both qualitative and quantitative approaches to explore the widespread roots of *Piri-Muridi*.

Keywords: *Pir*, spiritual problems, social problems, economic problems, psychological problems

1. Introduction

Sufism has a remarkable history in Pakistan and in the South Asian region, emerging for over thousands of years. Islam is the state religion of Pakistan, observed by 97% of the population and the remaining 3% practice Hinduism and Buddhism (Haub and Kaneda 2013). Gurdwaras and Sikhism that are situated at *Nankana Sahib* (district of Punjab) and Hasan Abdal has spiritual attraction for Sikhs all around the globe. *Sufis* and saints have a great attraction for pilgrims from diverse areas. In Pakistan, huge numbers of shrines are located which include, *Bahauddin Zakaria, Data Ganj Bakhsh, Shah Abdul Latif Bhattai, Baba Farid, Lal Shahbaz Qalandar, Shah Hussain,* and *Mian Mir* where thousands of devotees gather. This religious gathering takes the form of a spiritual and religious experience (Iqbal, Ali, Shabbir, and Saleem 2016). The *Sufi* shrines have been maintained by the hereditary saints (*Pirs)* who continuously ruled a lot of inhabitants.

Piri-Muridi (master-disciple) relationship is one of the most important dimensions of spiritual behavior among its all other widely spread dimensions, which have profound tangled origins in Pakistani society. In Pakistan, *Piri-Muridi* is basically characterized at two stages. The populist Sufism of the rural masses is the first stage which is connected with spiritual services and religious ceremonies that believe in the powers of intercessory saints, pilgrimage and great reverence at their shrines, and second stage is a spiritual relationship that binds the *Pir* (spiritual guide, holy man) and *Murid* (disciple) (Khan 2015).

There is a prevalent misapprehension about Sufism that it is separate from true essence of religion and that it educates the rejection of the world (van Bruinessen 2009). As far as authentic Sufisim and *Piri-Muridi* relationship is concerned, this is not true. Sufism does not teach the rejection of the world, instead it teaches the rejection of worldliness. It has been found that the standard to determine the accurate ideology is that it must not deny any essential requirement of life. All aspects of life are taken into account by a suitable and momentous ideology. This is the case with *Piri-Muridi.* It awakens the deeper realities of human life, emphasized on the core values and ultimately provides suitable direction for all characteristics of life (Khan 2015). But with the passage of time and with the evolution of culture and science, there came changes in every sphere of life. Among them Sufism and *Piri-Muridi* institution is also one to mention. The causal factors for the growth and changes in the institution of *Piri-Muridi* are discussed in the subsequent sections.

2. Causal factors for changes in *Piri-Muridi*

Piri-Muridi is surviving to an extent that it is affected by changes in society in *Pirs* and *Murids*. Above all, Sufism does not survive in an empty space. Like any other religious discourse and practice, *Piri-Muridi* is affected and influenced by broader cultural, political, and social forces (Cassanova as cited in Malik 2007).

2.1. Political and economic factors

It has been found that as the *Sufi* rituals developed, a partial split occurred within Sufism as the spiritual authority passed from spiritual instructor to trained follower. The *Murid* anticipated the role of *Pir* as a spiritual mediator. The common example of such *Pir* is the concept of traditional *Sajjada-Nishins* (successors of *Pirs)*. Moreover, as part of Ayub's (1961) modernization program, though most of the main shrines came under the control of government except the real organization of the shrines, the management of various religious activities, and the celebration of religious festivals continued under the supervision of the original *Sajjadah Nishins* (successors of *Pirs)*. Further, it has been reported that some of these *Pir'*s families used their spiritual power to get elections in the national and provincial governments (Hassanali 2009).

2.2. Pir is not a mediator but rather a barrier (in path of God)

According to Islamic perspective, if one has true faith in God, then one will approach Him in one's own personal way through formal prayer *namaz* or *salat* or *dua* (prayer) (Kabbani 2017). People having a strong belief will place their needs, difficulties, and wishes before Him and supplicate for His aid and help. On the other hand, people who follow *Piri-Muridi* institute ask for *Pir'*s help. The belief that when the *Pir* prays on one's behalf, he stands between the individual and one's God. He is not a medium, as he claims, but a barrier. This is equivalent to preaching and encouraging an escape from God.

2.3. Invitation to shirk (idolatry)

Of all the damaging effects of *Piri-Muridi*, the most pernicious is the tendency to practice and encourage shirk (idolatry). According to Islam, shirk (idolatry) in all its varieties, is a sin beyond forgiveness. It includes the asking of favors from humans, dead or alive, ancestor worship, tomb worship, and the giving of loyalty to any ideology or 'ism' or concept which rejects God as the only source of all power, and therefore His Oneness (Aziz 2001: 148).

Even though the institute of *Piri-Muridi* suffered from negative changes in the society, but the shrines of *Sufi* saints still have significant importance. Their social, political, economic, cultural, and religious importance will always be considerable (Abbas, Qureshi, Safdar, and Zakar 2013, Kreiner 2010, Platteau 2011). The tradition of visiting the shrines of *Sufi* saints for religious and spiritual purposes, fulfillment of desires and wishes, washing off sins, and *Pir* as a *Waseela* (medium between individual and God) has been a common practice since older times (Frembgen 2012).

According to Brewster (2011) visiting the shrines has traditionally been considered as a source of purification of the soul, body, and attainment of spiritual rewards. The researchers in the field of Psychology did not address the nature of problems or needs which compelled the people to visit holy shrines or *Pir'*s places. The present study is unique in this sense to cover this gap. As per the available literature, following are the various reasons for inclination towards *Piri-Muridi*.

2.4. Reasons for inclination towards Piri-Muridi

Most of the followers of *Piri-Muridi* described their living situation as stressful because of scarcity of resources, poor interpersonal relationships, feeling that they will be dependent on their children and family in near future, health related problems, lack of inner satisfaction and peace and poor economic conditions (Pirani, Papadopoulos, Foster, and Leavey 2008). These troubles of life are considered to worsen their physical and mental health (Glik 1988). People feel great sense of pleasure and contentment after visiting their *Pir* or a *Sufi* shrine (Levin 2008, Rhi 2001). They offer *mannat* (vow) to fulfill their desires and wishes of life. Furthermore, they use the *Sufi* shrines to gain economic power, political support, and also social power and status (Veer 2002).

Sufi shrines were in use for a variety of reasons (Farooq and Kiyani 2012). Most people who visit shrines belonged to marginalized segments of society (Abbas 2010, Ewing 1983) and they are usually of low socioeconomic status (Frembgen 2012). During the time when the eve of *Urs* (death ceremony of *Pir)* is near, all the followers of *Pir* and marginalized people including *Hijras* (transvestites), *Malangs* (religious mendicants), prostitutes, singers, etc. attend the ceremony with full enthusiasm (Chaudhary 2010). It has been found that *Dhamal* (spiritual dance) is also a feature of visitors of shrines particularly in the provinces of Sindh and the Punjab (Frembgen 2012). Many followers of *Piri-Muridi* visit these shrines and perform other rituals, which mainly include giving donations (money or kind). Most of the time free food is provided at shrines and it draws attention of poor people living in the nearby areas (Khan and Sajid 2011).

In addition to that the shrines also attract tourists from different parts of the country. A variety of amalgamations of creative and multicolored religious carnivals are the major inducements for non-believers of *Piri-Muridi,* as well as the worldly sightseers (Nolan and Nolan 1992). Furthermore, the motive of some people other than tourism is also to manage their psychological problems (Levin 2008).

The followers of *Piri-Muridi* had strong belief in the blessings of the *Sufi* shrines as they believe that their life is directed by the *Sufis*. They regularly visit the *Sufi* shrines. The visitors engaged in different rituals like offering of prayers, recitation of Holy Quran, donating free food, *Dhamal* (a *Sufi* dance sending devotees into a state of trance), *Chaddar Charhana* (Sufiritual) taking *Taweez* (amulet), tasting the salt, and eating sweets (Chaudhary 2010).

2.5. Social factors affecting people's perception

On the other hand, many devotees face problems in pursuit of getting spiritual healing through *Pirs*. A recent incident took place in Sargodha (city of Punjab) where a fake saint along with his four companions confessed that they killed twenty devotees with batons and knives because they feared that they had come to kill the shrine custodian (fake *Pir)*. The suspect appeared to be psychotic and had used similar type of violence against followers before this incident as well (Niazi and Khan 2017). Moreover, a dreadful incident took place in Burewala (a city in

southern Punjab's Vehari district) where a mentally disabled sixteen-year-old girl was brought to a fake *Pir* for treatment of her mental illness by her own mother. The *Pir* was considered to be a 'spiritual healer'. However, the treatment meant that the *Pir* reportedly subjected the young girl to rape and physical torture which ultimately resulted in her death (Naveed 2016). Furthermore, another incident took place in Lahore where a fake *Pir* beat a young girl so that she may get a good life partner. The girl was brought to the culprit (fake *Pir*) by her sister for spiritual treatment as she was not getting better proposals (Dunya News, April 2016). Actually, the irony with Pakistani poor people is that when they cannot understand complex social or natural phenomena, they tend to make myths and believe in exotic explanations. Pakistani poor people rarely use critical thinking to make sense of an unusual incidence; the alternate becomes the development of a mythical description using fake *Pirs* and their powers. Many people in Pakistan look for shortcuts to prosper. That is true in education, physical and mental health, social and professional life. Hard work, patience, and perseverance are required to attain success when one face troubles in life, which, inappropriately, is a commodity always short in supply in this part of the world (Younas 2018).

This shows that in Pakistan, the ineffective and wrong practices of *Piri-Muridi* have negatively affected the true spirit of *Piri-Muridi*. Sufism is practiced in a way that jeopardized the true spirit of Islam (Muneera 2000). Islam is against all types of superstitious behavior and cult worship. Muslims are encouraged to use logical reasoning to understand themselves and the diverse universe. Instead of becoming stooges in the hands of imposters, Islam emphasizes an active role to shape one's destiny through hard work (Sarıçam 2010).

3. The significance of the study

The socio psychological studies are helpful because they allow researchers to find out the exact reasons why people engage in certain behavior in different social contexts. Such studies use scientific methods to study people's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Cherry 2019). *Piri-Muridi* is an indigenously prevalent social issue that has been widely practiced in Pakistan. The present study attempts to explore this concept more comprehensively. For this purpose, the study incorporated some categorical questions from the respondents about what they think the reasons are why people follow *Piri-Muridi*, which has never been explored before. This enables the researcher to learn about the perceptions of people belonging from diverse sects about multidimensional queries raised at this institute. This will ultimately provide a base for others to conduct the research in a more feasible way and to explore more about *Piri-Muridi* phenomenon. Furthermore, it is a comprehensive study to learn about the differences between individuals from four belief systems; those who have strong belief in *Piri-Muridi* relationship (strong believers of *Piri-Muridi*), who are situational believers in the time of need and when getting entangled in catastrophes, those who are *Murids* of some *Gaddi Nashin* (successors of *Pirs*) comparing those who deny the significance of such relationship and are non-believers (Bhatti 2013).

This is a qualitative study which explored the phenomenon of *Piri-Muridi* that is widely practiced in our culture. In 2010, Hassan and Kamal developed an indigenous tool to measure this construct and explained some important domains of *Piri-Muridi*. This study portrayed one side of the picture as the interviews were carried out with *Sajjada Nashins* only. To address this limitation, the present study included semi structured interviews of participants belonging to diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, educational status and different religious sects. Moreover, the previous study (Bhatti 2013) was phenomenological understanding of *Piri-Muridi* by incorporating interviews of scholars coming from all the religious sects (*Sunni, Shia, Wahabi*) but the particular reasons which compel people to visit *Pirs* and what are the specific problems that are cured or guided by *Pirs* was not assessed in that study. The present study also aimed to fill that gap by exploring the reasons which compel people from diverse areas of population. The study is also nationally represented as the data was collected from four provinces of the country to get diverse opinions.

The current research highlights that *Pirs* services are sought in almost all belief systems with some variations. The study by (Bhatti 2013) explored the four belief systems (*Murids,* strong believers of *Piri-Muridi*, Situational believers of *Piri-Muridi*, non-believers of *Piri-Muridi*) and views of educated scholars related to *Piri-Muridi* but did not cater the views of community members who are either experiencing *Pirs* services, have taken *bait* (*Sufi* ritual of taking oath from a *Pir*) or completely refrain from visiting *Pirs*. The present study aimed to fill this gap by incorporating views of common community members who belonged in diverse educational, socio economic, and religious sects. The study has the following objectives.

3.1. Objectives

The study has following objectives:

1. To explore the belief system (*Murids,* situational believers, strong believers, or non-believers of *Piri-Muridi*) of participants as per their perception.

2. To explore different reasons which compel people to seek the services of *Pirs* as per their perception.

4. Method

4.1. Participants

431 adult Muslim men and women from different parts of the country were questioned. Total sample ($N = 431$) included 218 (52.78%) men and 195 (47.21%) women. 200 (52.78%) individuals were married and 213 (47.21%) unmarried. *Piri-Muridi* is a social issue which is practiced in all social and economic classes. Participants from low, middle and elite social classes were selected who were either educated or uneducated. Children or people under 18 years of age were not made part of study as they did not fall under the category of adults. For interview purposes, only ($N = 20$) individuals were approached as it was impossible to interviews all

413 individuals. These participants were selected based on convenient and snowball sampling technique. Participants were divided into four predefined categories of belief system (Bhatti 2013) as per their perception. *Murids* = 103 (24.93%), strong believers of *Piri-Muridi* = 83 (20.09%), situational believers of *Piri-Muridi* = 110 (26.63%), and non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* = 117 (28.32%).

Detail interviews were conducted with only twenty individuals ($N = 20$). Among them, *Murids* ($n = 5$) (who have taken a formal *bai't* from any *Pir* and are considered to be followers of that particular *Pir)* were approached through snowball sampling technique as they were difficult to identify and initial identification of few *Murids* helped in approaching other *Murids.* Strong believers of *Piri-Muridi* ($n= 5$) (who strongly believe in the existence and divine power of *Pir)*, situational believers ($n = 5$) (who only visit *Pir* at times of need), and non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* ($n = 5$) (who totally deny the existence of *Pir*) were approached through convenient sampling technique. The age of participants ranged from 18–73 years ($M = 30.38$, $SD = 10.74$) and they belonged from different religious sects and diverse educational backgrounds.

4.2. Data collection tool

Participants were asked two open-ended questions as part of demographic information. (a) Have they taken bait from any *Pir*? (If yes, then can you tell the name of *Pir* (optional) and other relevant information?) (b) Do you believe in *Piri-Muridi* relationship? (Strongly believe, believe to some extent, or totally deny this relation?) Open-ended semi-structured questions through funneling technique (with the help of previous experience, available literature, and observations) were developed and administered as a data and information gathering tools to explore the reasons why people visit *Pirs* (holy men) or shrines of *Sufis*. The questions were based on few broader domains after going through an extensive review of literature on the concept. The few broader guiding categories included reasons that compel people to visit the *Pirs*; either it is the attainment of religious and spiritual knowledge or it is the solution of their problems (spiritual problems, economic problems, social problems, psychological problems, religious problems and physical problems), which people seek from *Pirs*. People were given free hand to write anything as per their perception.

4.3. Procedure

Participants were briefed and their consent along with demographic information was taken. Participants were given a questionnaire booklet that included demographic information on the first page. They were asked about their belief system and whether they were *Murid* of any *Pir,* strong believers of *Piri-Muridi,* situational believers of *Piri-Muridi,* or non-believers of *Piri-Muridi.* They were provided with open spaces to categorize them by encircling only one option. This part of research attempted to look deeper by calculating frequencies and percentages about people's attitudes and opinions about *Piri-Muridi*.

4.4. Reliability

Reliability was established through two methods. One was inter-rater reliability and the other was the kappa coefficient. Inter-rater reliability was calculated by counting the number of ratings in agreement and dividing this by the total number of ratings. The number (fraction) in agreement was converted into percentage that revealed 80% agreement of independent raters with each other's ratings.

Furthermore, in order to reduce any chance of error, the kappa coefficient was also calculated using SPSS. The data in the form of transcriptions were analyzed by using word by word transcriptions. Care was also taken to analyze the data within the context it was written by participants. The raters read the transcription and gave the opinion in Yes or No form. Yes confirms that the transcription is transcribed in an accurate manner while No shows that transcription is not truly transcribed by the researcher. At the end, Yes/No responses of independent raters were entered in the SPSS and the kappa coefficient was calculated**.** We used content analysis (directed method) in which categories are generated when there is literature available on the construct but needs further exploration. The inter-rater reliability agreement between the two raters on outcomes of the study came out to be (*Kr = 0.783, p<.01, 95% CI= .030, .037*), which can be interpreted as a good agreement according to the interpretation ranges provided by Altman (1991).

5. Results and discussion

The study aimed at exploring the various reasons which compel people to visit *Piri-Muridi* institute. In the present study, directed method was used to explore the reasons which compel people to seek *Pirs* services. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for the responses of participants.

**Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of participants
about their perception of reasons for visiting *Pir* (N = 413)**

Reasons	Categories of participants				Total responses (*N* =413)
	Murids (*n* =103)	Strong believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n*=83)	Situational believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n* =110)	Non- believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n* = 117)	
	f (%)	*f (%)*	*f %)*	*f (%)*	*f* (%)
Clarification of problems and learning (BOTH)	80(77.66)	68(81.92)	54(49.09)	45(38.46)	247(59.80)
Learning and guidance	32(31.06)	37(44.57)	34(39.09)	35(29.91)	138(33.41)
Clarification of problems	12(11.65)	15(18.07)	38(34.54)	58(49.57)	123(29.78)

Note. Participants could have reported more than one reason in response to their perception;
f = frequency, % = percentage.

Table 1 shows the frequencies and percentages of participants about their perception of various reasons for visiting the *Pir*. Participants reported highest frequency for clarification of problems and learning (59.80%) followed by learning and guidance (33.41%) and clarification of problems (29.78%). The specific reasons for visiting *Pir*s are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of participants
about what they think are specific reasons for visiting *Pir* (N = 413)

Nature of reasons	Categories of participants				Total responses (*N* = 413)
	Murids (*n* =103)	Strong believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n* =83)	Situational believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n*= 104)	Non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n* = 107)	
	f(%)	*f* (%)	*f* (%)	*f* (%)	*f*(%)
Spiritual reasons	87(84.46)	46(55.42)	50(48.07)	42(39.25)	225 (54.47)
Social reasons	40(38.83)	38(45.78)	39(37.5)	22(20.56)	139 (33.65)
Economic reasons	30(29.12)	28(33.73)	32(30.76)	44(41.12)	134 (32.44)
Psychological reasons	32(31.06)	21(25.30)	35(33.63)	35(32.71)	123 (29.78)
Health-related reasons	37(35.92)	20(24.09)	27(25.96)	32(29.90)	116 (28.08)
Critical opinions towards *Piri-Muridi*	-	3(3.61)	8(7.69)	8(7.47)	19(4.60)

Note. Participants could have reported more than one reason in response to their perception.

Table 2 shows the frequencies and percentages of participants about their perception of nature of problems/reasons for visiting the *Pir*. Participants reported highest frequency for spiritual problems (54.47%), followed by social problems (33.65%), economic problems (32.44%), while psychological problems and health-related problems were reported to have almost similar percentage, i.e. 29.78% and 28.08% respectively.

Mental satisfaction and tranquility are the main reasons why people visit the *Sufi* shrines. As people face a lot of tensions, disturbances and troubles in their lives, so in order to acquire some peace of mind and meditation, they found ultimate refuge at *Sufi* shrines. Furthermore, people get good wishes, hopes for achievement and confidence that their wishes will be fulfilled. The *Sufi* shrines also become a source of catharsis. They personally feel a sense of closeness to divine power by visiting them. People bow before Allah, ask for favors, and seek forgiveness for their sins. People believe that this helps them in *Tazkia Nafs* (self-realization) and when they depart from shrine, they have a feeling of relaxation and enlightenment. These rituals and religious practices help to find meaning, purpose, and structure in the life of followers.

Social problems included marriage problems of daughters and sons, passing exams, mitigation of family disputes, resolution of family conflicts, praying for marriage with the beloved and for the better future for children, and for birth of a child. Most people visit *Pirs* and *Sufi* shrines to resolve their family disputes and conflicts. For this purpose, they use *Taweez* (amulet) and *Dum* (*Sufi* recitation of Quranic verses). Further, people also visit for their daughter's marriage proposals; they ask their *Pir* for *Istakhara* (a prayer recited when an individual needs guidance) in order to get help in social problems and for getting better jobs. *Sufi* shrines are not only a source of food for the caretakers of shrines but also for the visitors who come from far off places to get blessings of *Sufi*s.

Economic problems included opportunities for a good job, endorsement in a job, success in business and avoiding monetary crises. It has been found that people who visit the *Sufi* shrines have a strong belief that they will be blessed with good fortune if they visit any shrine and offer prayers. Many devotees who were without a job and belonged to low socio-economic status visited a shrine to acquire economic benefits, employment opportunities or work to meet their minimum survival.

Stress, anxiety and depression are highly correlated with the social issues because of less social support, lack of educational facilities, disputes among interpersonal relationships. Keyes (2002) proposed that positive emotions and psychological and social well-being are considered as the components of subjective well-being, which is considered as the state of mental comfort. Mentally healthy individuals have a high sense of subjective well-being. Contrary to them, individuals who have poor mental health have a low sense of subjective well-being, e.g. feelings of sadness or falling ill reduce the well-being of an individual. In this regard, followers seek healing through therapeutic rituals, meditation, and fulfillment of their wishes by contacting *Pirs*.

Health-related problems included cure from a disease or illness. Many followers of *Piri-Muridi* think that *Pir* has a spiritual power to cure chronic diseases like cancer or hepatitis. It has been found that the perceptions of people were different about the presentation of religious rituals at *Sufi* shrines and blessings that were linked with those religious acts. Many of the devotees claimed that the oil placed at *Mazar* (tomb) in the lamps will never let their hair become white or grey, while non-believers did not believe this. Others simply viewed that the oil is useful because it helps to remove physical pains. They thought that this oil, if applied on ankles and knees will lessen the pain in joints.

5.1. Interview reporting by Murid

One participant, for example, who reported to be *Murid* of a *Pir* described social, spiritual, physical, psychological, economic problems in these words, "*Social problems, to live in the world and to serve the humanity; Spiritual problems, to live with respect, dignity, and peace in this world and hereafter; Health-related problems; Allah Almighty has ingrained finesse for treatment of every disease from the first day; Psychological problems, Allah Almighty has put power in pure verses (Quranic verses) which are affective with the help of any Pir; Economic problems,*

an integral Pir's dua (prayer) can be helpful in case of disturbance in economic problems and a person can pray to Allah and ask questions for his problems."

Furthermore, non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* viewed this as a sign of weak belief in God. For instance, one participant reported, *"Those people who lost their hope in Allah and make expectations from others and do not show patience"*.

Moreover, strong believers of *Piri-Muridi* and situational believers claimed that fake *Pirs* in our society are using people's money and hurting their religious and spiritual sentiments by using *Piri-Muridi* as a business. These frauds have adopted many illegal ways and claim to provide cure for people's dilemmas of life. These include highly un-Islamic practices, such as, for example, the use of black magic or having control over unseen powers '*Jin'*.

5.2. Interview with a strong believer of Piri-Muridi

For instance, one participant reported that "*In this era, many fake Pirs have emerged which will eventually demean in front of this world. These fake Pirs have adopted the face of Wali Allah and have flayed common people, they will be demeaned in both worlds and it is prayer that such fake Pirs be extirpated and become sign of Admonition*".

It can be argued that in Pakistan, a lot of unqualified and poor people play games with other people and waste their time and money. People who are unable to solve their problems themselves become puppets in the hands of fake *Pirs* with the belief that they will conquer their ill-fortune and hardships. People in all their ignorance make self-fulfilling prophecies and start to see signs of fulfillment of their material and spiritual desires and subconsciously do such things which bring their prophecies to fruition. The mind following these prophecies does not have to do anything with realism. People take that as a proof of what they want to believe in, although most imaginings show the truth in some reverence at some point in time (Younas and Kamal 2017a, Younas and Kamal 2017b, Younas 2018).

Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages of participants about their perception of education acquired by people after visiting their particular *Pir*. 42.13% participants think that it is the religious education that people need to acquire from *Pir*. The second highest percentage was observed for spiritual education (38.74%). Moreover, a need to gain worldly education was reported to be 14.77%. All the frequencies regarding the belief system of participants are also given. The above also shows that the majority of *Murids* think that it is the spiritual education that people seek from *Pirs*. Believers of *Piri-Muridi* viewed *Piri-Muridi* institution as a way of gaining religious, spiritual and worldly education, which is essential for becoming a better human being. They thought that without any *Murshid* or *Pir*, one cannot become pure (*Insan e Kamil*).

Religious education meant knowledge related to Islam, including education related to *Namaz* (prayers), *Roza* (fast), *Zakat* (the third pillar of Islam, mandatory imbursement given once a year to the needy, used for charitable trust and religious purposes) and *Hajj* (pilgrimage). Moreover, *tafseer e Quran,* i.e. explanation of the Holy Quran with background content, as well as different views and opinions of scholars on the verse, and problems of *Fiqh* are also included in religious education.

**Table 3. Frequencies and percentages of participants' views
about the type of education people seek from *Pir* (N = 413)**

Type of education	Categories of participants				Total responses (*N* = 413)
	Murids (*n* = 103)	Strong believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n* =83)	Situational believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n*= 104)	Non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* (*n* = 107)	
	f (%)	*f* (%)	*f* (%)	*f* (%)	*f* (%)
Religious education	62(60.19)	51(61.44)	37(35.57)	24(22.42)	174 (42.13)
Spiritual education	78(75.72)	52(62.65)	20(19.23)	10(9.34)	160 (38.74)
Worldly education	24(23.30)	15(18.07)	11(10.57)	11(10.28)	61 (14.77)
Education of black magic	-	-	1(0.96)	5(4.67)	6 (1.45)

Note. Participants could report more than one reason.

Pir teaches his *Murids* moral development to the extent that one has attained control over one's inner life. It may include meditation, which is attention and improvement of the power of thought towards God. Furthermore, education related to *bait, Peeri Murshadi* or *Walayat* which basically refers to *Sufi* and spiritual teachings is also part of this category. In *Sufi* language, this specific spiritual education is called '*ism*' (spiritual/ holy verses), only given to *khalifa (Murid,* successor) of a *Pir*. For instance, one *Murid* stated, "*People take bait, seek religious, worldly, and spiritual education from progenitors of religion (Wali, friends of Allah) and achieve success (victory). This chine (series) of Christendom will continue until resurrection.*" Another participant stated, "*Pir destroys the inner (ego) soul present within us that keep provoking in worldly volitions, when soul becomes pure then the heart also starts memorizing God*".

Knowledge related to worldly affairs contained problems of everyday life, for example, how to be a better person, a good Muslim, husband, wife, daughter, son, teacher, businessman, doctor etc. All social and economic issues are addressed in worldly education. For instance, one participant reported, "*Pir teaches respect, decorum, salutation. He teaches liege and anthrop. He helps in becoming better person for the society, guides in every type of problem (issue)."*

The present study attempted to clarify that the true essence of *Piri-Muridi* encourages the education of religion and spirituality and that the true *Pirs* did two very significant things, which cannot be overlooked. First, they endorse and spread humane values of Islam among Muslims and second, they facilitated the spread of Islam (religious education) as a direct result of teaching humane values. Almost all relate *Pirs* with Islam, including believers, situational believers, and *Murids* and to them a *Pir* is like a spiritual guide who helps people (Younas and Kamal 2019).

5.3. Interview with non-believers of Piri-Muridi

Non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* think that people do not learn anything positive from (fake) *Pirs. * Instead*,* their aim is to learn black magic to harm others. They view it as a sin and *bid'at* (any revelation added in religion) in religion. One non-believer of *Piri-Muridi* stated, "*Their motive is not to attain education rather they want to achieve everything (material rewards) without doing struggle*." Another participant reported, "*They learn black magic to degrade others*."

Non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* viewed this as totally fake and claim that people have a weak faith in God and are thus compelled to seek help without making any effort on their own. It can be argued that in Pakistan, the word *Pir* is being misunderstood or misused. Basically, a *Pir* is friend or companion of God. The Qur'an and *hadith* (sayings of Prophet (PBUH) give clear guideline about true escorts, friends, companions and *Wali* (friend) of Allah.) If the help given by *Wali* Allah goes beyond the true Islamic guidance, then it refers to something that is not *Pir's* help, but instead goes beyond legitimate help and support.

6. Conclusion

Besides developing a deeper understanding of people's perceptions related to *Piri-Muridi,* the findings of the present study produce theoretical foundations for future studies. The present study found that people visit *Pirs* for getting help in spiritual, social, economic, psychological, and health-related problems. Moreover, people acquire religious education, spiritual education, and worldly education by visiting their *Pir*. On the other hand, non-believers of *Piri-Muridi* totally deny this phenomenon and claim that that people learn black magic from (fake) *Pirs.*

7. Implications

With the help of qualitative part, the present study attempts to identify the problems that compel people to seek the services of *Pirs.* The findings of the study also implied that a visit to any *Pir* should be made with caution as it is clear that people spend a lifetime suffering from problems concerning marriage, relationship, children, career and finance, but this belief becomes a problem when they religiously surrender themselves to the baseless prophecies made by their invalidated spiritual leaders and fake *Pirs.* The empirically explored multidimensional aspects of present research open new avenues and horizons to debate, questions and challenges to the existing belief system about *Piri-Muridi.* The study spreads awareness about the true nature of *Piri-Muridi*. The underlying implication of the research paper is to understand the process and dimensions of *Piri-Muridi*. It is not important to judge if believing in *Piri-Muridi* is right or wrong, whether the important thing is the belief system, attainment of knowledge, either religious, worldly, or spiritual. Further, the social organizations, mental health workers, religious scholars, and social workers

can also make use of the empirical evidence that practices of Sufism can be beneficial for the well-being of people and fake practices of *Piri-Muridi* should be avoided.

8. Limitation and suggestions

Since it was an exploratory study, no assumptions were drawn, and no hypothesis testing was presented here. It is suggested that there is a need to tackle these questions with the help of both qualitative and quantitative approach. This will enable researchers to investigate the spiritual needs of individuals who wish to be connected with God in order to improve their psychological health. Other psychological factors, such as cognitive beliefs, personality traits, bonding with God, religious orientation, spirituality, etc. could be further explored.

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