

Induction of Fear in Christian Teachings and the Impact on the Psychological and Physiological Aspect: A Case Study of the Khasis Church

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Abstract: The aim of the study is to assess the use of fear in Christian teachings and the impact it creates psychologically and physiologically. The hypothesis of the study is the method of teaching using fear has led to favourable behaviour in an individual and has an impact in the psychological and physiological aspect. The study is based on Ivan Pavlov's theory of classical conditioning (1897). The participants were between the ages of 20-65 years old. The study was conducted through a semi-structured interview. Thematic Analysis was used to analyse the data collected. The results showed that the Null Hypothesis has been accepted.

Keywords: Fear, Christian, Psychological, Physiological, Behaviour, Conditioning

1. Introduction

When we take a look from a psychological perspective, and dive into Freud's view on Religion and Fear, he states in his work *The Future of an Illusion* (1927) that religion is an illusion created by our subconscious mind in its attempt to cope with fear, helplessness and terrors of the natural world. He also states that the sources of fear are due to helplessness, morality and suffering. This fear can in turn affect us psychologically where we search for a paternal omnipotent figure to shield and protect us.

Dating back to the teachings of the Bible, we can trace the Christian teachings of the original sin. The teachings begin with God creating man from his own image and when man committed his first sin, it stayed with mankind and in addition we have our personal sins. According to the teachings it is believed that by the grace of God and path to redemption our sins can be forgiven and we can earn an eternal place in heaven. The belief that humans can be saved by "God" is a core belief of the teachings of Christianity. The fear of life after death and hell creates a purpose for people to live their life religiously and earn an eternal place in heaven. This fear has been used by many preachers as a method to scare the audience to attend church regularly and practice the teachings of the Bible.

Historically, in Europe many kings who follow Christianity have used the teachings of the Bible as a method for people in their kingdom to obey them and believed that they are anointed by God himself to lead. In disobeying the King, the people are also disobeying God and they will go to Hell. Before the Protestant Reformation, the Church used the sale of indulgence so people can buy their place into heaven whilst not holding them accountable for the crimes they committed. These patterns of inducing fear in people have been seen all over history especially in Christianity, to serve needs and purposes of people in higher power.

Needless, the purpose of these teaching methods is used to terrorise people to seek their grace and redemption. The fear of mortality and the unknown of what lies after death can cause an alarm of uncertainty in humanity. The belief of a lifetime of punishment in Hell can encompass a fear. This research study will dive into the extends of how much these fears can affect people psychologically and physiologically.

The aim of this research study is to assess the use of fear in Christian teaching and its impact on the psychological and physiological aspects. The study focuses on preachings in Churches that uses the method of inducing fear in teachings in order for people to follow the path of redemption or righteousness. While this method has its upside on the religious perspective, but it can also be seen to affect people in their mental state and also their physical state. The study will also focus on religious practices like "Revival" and the outcome of these practices.

Ivan Pavlov's theory of Classical Conditioning (1897) states that when we want to increase behaviour, we use a system of reward and when we want to decrease behaviour, we use punishment. This theory correlates to the teaching method of the church. When an individual follows the rules of the Bible or Church, they are being praised and when they don't, they are being threatened with going to hell.

The hypothesis of the study is the method of teaching using fear has led to favourable behaviour in an individual and has an impact in the psychological and physiological aspect. The study is mainly focused on a target population. There are also a clash of cultural practices and religious practices that have been observed.

2. Material And Method

The aim of the research paper is to assess the teaching method in Christianity by inducing fear and its impact psychologically and physiologically. The study is based on Ivan Pavlov's theory of Classical Conditioning (1897). Using fear as a factor to preach to the audience in church, can help to instil more guilt in them when their behaviour is not aligning with the values and beliefs of the Church.

The study utilizes a Qualitative research design to examine the method of teaching of the Church. The study was conducted through interviews. A qualitative approach was selected to capture a more in-depth understanding of how much these teaching methods can impact an individual's daily life. It can also capture a broader explanation of the impacts these methods can have on an individual. The study focuses on an individual's observation and experience from attending services or preaching.

The study was conducted through a non-probability sampling technique. Two methods were used, i.e., convenience and purposive sampling technique. Some participants who were part of the study were chosen because of their qualification and experience in theology. Participants who did not necessarily have a theology degree but they are church leaders. Other participants that participated are attendees and are considered as observers. The ages of the participants ranged between 20 to 65 years old.

The study consisted of 20 participants and a semi-structured interview was conducted. There were a few sets of pre-determined questions and depending on the participant and their views the questions can have a higher depth. The interview was conducted on a one-on-one basis.

The data was collected via physical interviews and a few was conducted through Zoom. The interview consisted of a minimum of 5 questions per participant. The interviews varied from 20-45 minutes per participants. The participants provided a verbal consent to get an audio recording during the interview.

The data was analysed using based on Thematic Analysis to identify the patterns across the data. During analysing the data, clashes were found between religious and cultural values.

The study is limited to the Khasi Churches and the research design did not use a quantitative method. The study does not go in-depth to the cultural and religious clashes in the Church. The study is also only limited to Christianity.

The study was conducted with ethical standard guidelines and procedures. The participants who took part in the study are to remain confidential. The participants voluntarily participated in the study and were asked for consent before starting.

3. Results

Statistics

Response					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	No	6	30.0	30.0	30.0
	Neutral	2	10.0	10.0	40.0
	Yes	12	60.0	60.0	100.0
	Total	20	100.0	100.0	

Response		
N	Valid	20
	Missing	0

Table 1: Shows the frequency and cumulative percent of the responses

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Response	20	100.0%	0	0.0%	20	100.0%

Descriptives					Statistic	Std. Error
Response	Mean				.30	.206
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	Upper Bound	-.13	
					.73	
	5% Trimmed Mean				.33	
	Median				1.00	
	Variance				.853	
	Std. Deviation				.923	

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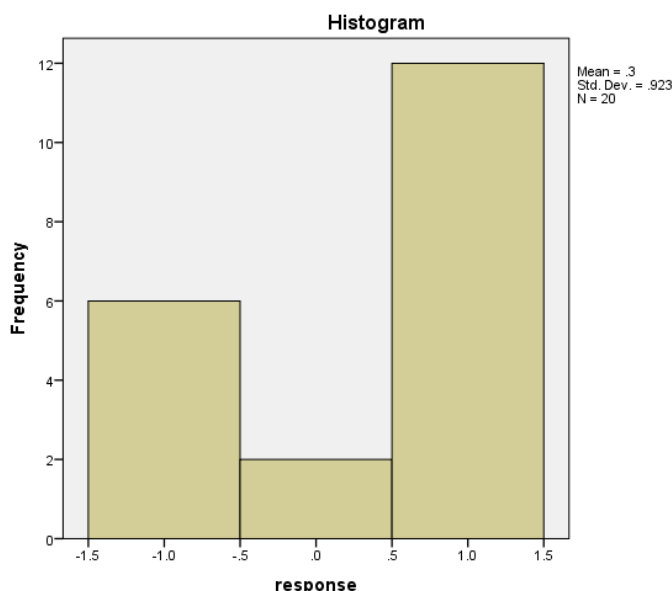
	Minimum	-1	
	Maximum	1	
	Range	2	
	Interquartile Range	2	
	Skewness	-.677	.512
	Kurtosis	-1.548	.992

Table 2: Shows the Median, Std. Deviation and Range of the responses

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	Df	Sig.	Statistic	Df	Sig.
Response	.376	20	.000	.670	20	.000

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 3: Shows the normality of the response



The church uses a method of fear to teach their audience about the scriptures. This has been observed through history when the holy scriptures were used to make people obey and follow the teachings and values of the people in power. Participants in this study have been interviewed about their experiences.

The responses are calculated by their response of 'Yes', 'No' or 'Neutral', which is then quantified into a score of 1, -1, 0 respectively. The data was run on SPSS and the results showed in Table 2 and 3, showed that the Median=1.00, Variance=.853, Standard Deviation=.923, Minimum=-1, Maximum=1, Range=2 and p-value=.000. Using Shapiro-Wilk test, the p-value ≥ 0.005 , hence the Null Hypothesis is accepted. The concludes that Christian Method of teachings in the Khasi Church uses a method of fear. The effect of that fear has shown that it affects some people while most of them remain unaffected by it.

4. Discussion

The aim of this research study is to assess the teaching method in Christianity by inducing fear and its impact psychologically and physiologically. The hypothesis states the method of teaching using fear has led to favourable behaviour in an individual and has an impact in the psychological and physiological aspect. The research is based on Ivan Pavlov's theory of reinforcement (1897).

The participants who participated are about ages 20-65 years old and the data was collected through interviews. The responses were then quantified based on their responses 'Yes', 'No' or 'Neutral' and was scored 1, -1, 0 respectively. The data was then run on SPSS and the results showed that the p-value is ≥ 0.005 , therefore Null Hypothesis is accepted. The data cannot be run through further test because it is a Qualitative Data.

Although the data proved in favour of the Hypothesis, there is a lot to uncover. Firstly, when we look at fear from a religious perspective, we can find that there are two types of fear i.e., servile and filial fear. According to R. Scott Clark (2015), servile fear is the fear of God based on the fear of judgement or punishment which is the fear of the concept of Heaven and Hell whereas, filial fear is the fear of God and it is from a respectful, loving perspective that comes from trust and love. The difference between servile and filial fear is one focuses on consequence and the other on relationship. One is motivated by punishment, despair and consequences while the other is motivated by trust, love, relationship and reverence.

Based on the research study conducted, it has been observed that majority attend or follow the scripture due to servile fear. The fear of going to Hell after death has a strong hold on people and the church uses this fear or weakness and associate it to

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advance or decrease behaviours. If the church sees unfavourable behaviours, they threaten people with the concept of Hell. Although, we do live in a time period where people can read and have their own critical thinking. Whilst some do not let this fear affect any prospect of their lives, however, it has affected others.

We live in a time where people do not follow anything blindly and they do not let this method of teaching consume them. However, a small report on cases of physical inability has been observed due to religion. People are scared to go on their daily life due to the consumption of religious thoughts and practices that have clouded and feared their minds. There hasn't been any observation or responses of people reporting that they follow or obey religion because they see God as their sovereign. Although church leaders mostly disagree that they use the method of fear in the church, Theologians however say the complete opposite. They reported due to the increase of many charismatic leader that cults are formed and churches do indeed use fear while preaching. This fear can be a positive reinforcement that can increase only favourable behaviour but excess fear has been observed to affect the lives of a few individuals.

It may also arise the question of "Should only Theologians who have an education background be allowed to preach in churches?". However, many people would disagree because religion sees the "calling of God" as a valid reason as to why someone is allowed to lead a church. This idea can however be dangerous as it can take an overturn and affect the lives of many innocent people. In many villages, people have got out of their local church to follow cults and this can sometimes be dangerous for the followers. Followers of cults starts distancing themselves from people and cut off their social life. Their lives become only about whatever their leader preaches and this leads to a dysfunction in their lives.

Another observation made was the practice of "Revival". During revival, many people have reported to having encounter the "Holy Spirit", but these accusations do not hold any evidence. They maybe signs of panic attack due to an overwhelming huge crowd and in some cases, for the attention.

Revival services are held with thousands of people and not everything is managed properly. Many people end up in the hospital and fasting has been seen as a dangerous practice especially for people with sickness and old age. Fasting is not mandatory but it is followed by many. While fasting is a practice used by many culture and religion, for various health benefit. However, if it is not followed properly it can lead to health risk. The practice of fasting should be followed by proper methods and taking a gradual approach. In the Khasi church, fasting is not regulated in a proper and safe manner. Therefore, the practice of fasting during especially Revival has been reported to leave many attendees in the hospital.

Another observation made during the study, is the clashes between culture, especially in the Khasi church. The Khasis follow a matrilineal system where women are allowed to hold power in society in some way but the church follows a patriarchal system. The Bible was written at a time and from a culture and community where women are second class citizen and have no power in society. Although this changes in the New Testament, there are still many question on a woman's power in church. For example, in the Presbyterian Church Women Pastors are not allowed to be ordained yet even if they have the same qualifications and experience as a man. This clash between the culture has lowered the power of a woman's position in the church.

The Bible is a vast book and it has numerous interpretations. Sometimes these interpretations can lead to danger and affect the lives of people. The method of fear is not necessarily bad but it becomes harmful when it is done in excess. The question is "how much fear is too much?". Sometimes it can be healthy and other times it can affect people's mental health. Earlier the concept of a degrading mental health was seen as the work of the devil in church but with time this view has changed. The same thing can be applied here. "Can the church change it's method of teaching with the progression of time?"

5. Conclusion

The study shows that the method of teachings of church has led to servile fear in individuals. By analysing the data collected, the study shows that the method of teaching in the Church has revealed the increase of fear in individuals but has not always affected to a point where their lives become dysfunctional. These findings also suggest that these method of teaching has led to a clash between religion and system of society. The study finds that these method of teaching has only led to people fearing Hell and not forming a loving, trusting relationship with God.

Fear can be a powerful tool in reinforcement and teaching methods but it can also lead to fearing of wrong things. This fear can lead to performative practices that will only impact people's mental and physical health. The difference between the ideologies of leaders with a theology degree and without one is vast. From their interpretation of the scripture to their methods of teachings. Further research should investigate on the charismatic leader and women's place in the church.

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