

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS, ANOMIE, AND AUTHORITARIANISM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationships between socioeconomic status, feeling of anomie, and authoritarianism. Three questionnaires including objective and subjective dimensions of socioeconomic status, anomie, and authoritarianism were administered on 400 students in Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran. Results showed significant negative relationship between socioeconomic status and feeling of anomie and authoritarianism. In addition, significant positive relationship was found between anomie and authoritarianism. Regression analyses demonstrated that anomie has a mediation effect on the relationships between socioeconomic status and authoritarianism. These findings suggest that widespread feeling of anomie and authoritarianism in Iran are under influence of socioeconomic status.

Keywords: *SES, authoritarianism, feeling of anomie, Iran*

INTRODUCTION

For several decades, psycho-social indicators of authoritarianism have been cogently discussed which highlights the importance of this topic. For example, authoritarianism has shown to be associated with a variety of psychological factors (Dru, 2003; Rubinstein, 2003; Ekehammar, Akrami, Gylje, & Zakrisson, 2004; Van IJzendoorn, 1989; Roccato & Ricolfi, 2005; Roccato, 2008), education, and parenting practices (Crockett & Meidinger, 1956; Simons, 1966; Scodel & Mussen, 1953; Scodel & Freedman, 1956; Duriez, Soenens, & Vansteenkiste, 2008). On the one hand, most of the studies are carried out in industrial countries which might not represent Middle-Eastern countries since we know from the literature that perception of authoritarianism is culturally dependent (Assadi, et al., 2007; Rudy & Grusec, 2001). On the other hand, less research has been carried out regarding psychology and sociology of authoritarianism in the Middle-East (Assadi, et al., 2007). Similarly, studies carried out on authoritarianism in Iran have often centered on politics and as a result, the sociocultural context of this phenomenon has been overlooked (Katouzian, 2001; Kamrava & Dorraj, 2008; Mackey & Entessar, 1997). In contrast, the current article touches on sociological factors such as socioeconomic status (SES) and anomie to discover their relation to authoritarianism.

Conceptualizing authoritarianism as a personality trait began with the influential book of Adorno et al., (1950), *The Authoritarian Personality*. They described authoritarianism as a type of personality consisting of nine characteristics: conventionalism, authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression, anti-interception, superstition and stereotypy, power orientation and toughness, destructiveness and cynicism, projectivity, and excessive fixation on sexuality (p. 228). Recently, Altemeyer (1998) renewed the theoretical foundation of authoritarianism and characterized it as co-variations of three attitudinal clusters including conventionalism which refers to deference to norms, submission to the authority, and intolerance to any deviation from norms.

Most of previous researches have well elucidated the distribution of authoritarianism within social classes and its association with psychological and social constructs; even though some mediating variables between socioeconomic status and authoritarianism have been

proposed. Lipset (1959) proposed some of these variables that might have influence on authoritarianism such as low participation in political organization or in voluntary organizations of any type, occupational and economic insecurity, little reading and isolated occupations, and authoritarian family patterns. But as far as we know there were no empirical studies of the proposed mediating variables between SES and authoritarianism, except Scheepers et al. (1992). By reviewing the basic theories and previous literature, anomie is hypothesized to be a good mediating variable between SES and authoritarianism.

It is expected that SES affects authoritarianism directly and, through a feeling of anomie, indirectly. Moreover, the study was conducted in Iran for the first time. Thus, the result would give us clear information about the role of anomie in predisposition of individuals for authoritarianism and also it would clarify the generalizability of previous speculations about SES, anomie and authoritarianism in Iran.

SES AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most researched concepts in sociology. Assuming that people of lower socioeconomic status are more likely to be authoritarian, Lipset (1959; 1960) proposed that not only SES is associated with authoritarianism, but also it is the most important determinant of authoritarianism. Lower SES subsequently eliminates possibilities of better education, occupation, and yields lower participation in social activities and political organization. Lipset (1959, 1960) also points out that economic insecurity and instability which is a characteristic of lower SES families facilitates authoritarianism: "if elements which contribute to a lack of sophistication and detachment from the general cultural values constitute an important factor associated with lower- class authoritarian proclivities, a second and no less important factor is a relative lack of economic and psychological security. Economic uncertainty, unemployment, and fluctuation in total income all increase with more down the socio economic ladder. Economic insecurity clearly affects the political and attitudinal responses of groups" (p. 491). Lipset asserts that *working class authoritarianism* is not restricted to the western countries and generalizes his theory to include developing countries.

A body of research has supported Lipset's hypothesis by revealing significant correlation between socioeconomic status and authoritarianism (e.g. Lipset, 1965; Srole 1956; Roberts & Rokeach, 1956; McDill 1961; Sheepers, Felling & Peters 1992). In addition, authoritarian patterns are found to be more common in lower SES families (Assadi, et al., 2007; Floyd & Saitzyk, 1992; Hoff, Laursen, & Tardif, 2002). Similarly, Kohn (1976 1977) and Kohn and Scholler (1969, 1978 and 1979) found that Low SES individuals are more authoritarian in their social attitude and their parenting behavior.

However, not all studies have supported Lipset's theory. For example, Lipsitz (1965) argues that low SES people are more authoritarian but this is more due to low educational level rather than other factors that Lipset (1959, 1960) proposed. Napier and Jost (2008) indicate that out of four psychological aspects of authoritarianism which are *conventionalism*, *moral absolutism*, *obedience to authority*, and *cynicism*, only obedience to authority and cynicism are common in low socioeconomic status. Rigby, Metzger, and Ray (1985) report different results in different areas and in some cases insignificant results for the association between occupational status and authoritarianism in Britain and three different regions of Australia. They point out that Lipset's theory of working class authoritarianism has lack of generalizability across cultures. Wright (1972) and Grabb (1980) also report insignificant association between SES and authoritarianism. Similar to Lipsitz (1965), Grabb (1979, 1980) concluded that education is the strongest determining factor of authoritarian attitudes rather

than SES. The literature regarding the association of socioeconomic status and SES seems to be controversial and there is a need for more research especially in developing countries.

ANOMIE AND AUTHORITARIANISM

Anomie is sociological concept that pertains to a normless society in which major values become invalid to people (Durkheim, 1951, 1984). In anomie status people start to feel lonely, develop hostile perception toward others (i.e. everybody wants to abuse others to gain more benefit), loose their morals, and behave based on self-interest (Dean, 1968; Fischer, 1973; Tivan, 1975; Kapsis, 1978; Knoty, 2005). Anomie feelings lead the individual to feel angry and frustrated and emerge when the means and goals become separated in a society and people do not receive enough opportunities to reach their goals (Agnew, 1980; Kapsis, 1978). Durkheim (1897/1951) underscores mass society as the source of anomie and remarks that lack of integration in society can cause anomie. But how might anomie status relate to authoritarianism?

Arendt (1951) in her book entitled "*Origin of Totalitarianism*" articulates that totalitarianism originates from mass society. She believes that individuals' isolation and loneliness facilitate authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Authoritarianism provides a solution for escaping from common experience of normlessness, confusion, and societal rupture. Similarly, Fromm (1941) stresses that anomic individuals find authoritarianism to be a way to resolve their confusion. In his point of view, authoritarianism is an adaptation mode for lonely and isolated individuals. People in an anomic society find authoritarianism to be a potential way to overcome anxiety through assault and violence against dissident groups. Therefore, according to Fromm (1941), anomie might cause authoritarianism (see also Scheepers et al. 1992). Oesterreich (2005) considers authoritarian reaction as individuals' basic response to anxiety, stressful situation, uncertainty, and insecurity and he names it as "flight into security" (Oesterreich, 2005, p. 282). In general, these approaches to some extent rely on the idea that anxiety increases the tendency of relying on authorities who provide security for an individual or a group.

Some empirical studies have reported significant relationship between anomie and authoritarianism (Blank, 2003; Lutteman & Middleton, 1970; Mcdill, 1961; Mulford 1968; Roberts & Rokeach, 1956; Sheepers, Felling & Peters, 1992; Srole, 1956). However, the association of anomie and authoritarianism in the mentioned studies has been a sub-result where both anomie and authoritarianism are independent variables. Therefore, the potential mediating effect of anomie has been completely ignored (web of science brings no result).

SES AND ANOMIE

Merton (1938, 1968) interprets the concept of anomie as a discrepancy between cultural goals and legitimate means for reaching these goals. Culture advocates certain goals (for example: richness, high education, prestige, etc.) but legitimate means for fulfilling these wishes are not evenly available to people of different social statuses. Merton (1938, 1968) believes that the gap between the goals and means leads to frustration, anger, and anomie. On this ground, lower socioeconomic status individuals are apt to be more anomic since they lack more resources for reaching the success, as defined by cultural values. This hypothesis has been supported by a large body of research (Bell, 1957; Car & Hauser, 1976; Lee, 1974; Menard, 1995; Mizruchi, 1960; Rushing, 1971, Teevan, 1975).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

Four hundred students were randomly chosen from Shahid Chamran University, Ahvaz, Iran. They were told that the participation is voluntarily and assured about the anonymity of the data. 18 subjects were purged from the analysis due to incomplete answers and the rest including 182 males and 200 females, ranged in age from 18 to 29 ($M=21.88$, $SD=2.33$) were analyzed. It is noteworthy that governmental universities of Iran (including Shahid Chamran University) to some extent represent different socioeconomic statuses since the tuition fee is waived for all students and also there are some quotas for smaller cities and villages to facilitate higher education. Thus, we expect governmental universities to be more representative of ethnic and socioeconomic diversities of Iran.

Measurements

The data of the current research were collected by self-report questionnaires. Feeling of anomie, objective and subjective socioeconomic status, and authoritarianism questionnaires with a few demographic questions such as participants' age, gender, ethnicity, and marital status were required from students to fill out.

Feeling of anomie - There was no appropriate scale for measuring feeling of anomie in Iran and among a few existing valid and reliable scales, deviance behavior was available that could be used. But, according to Merton (1968), anomie is different from deviance since deviant behavior is only one mode of adaptation to an anomic situation. Thus, for measuring feeling of anomie, 13 items from the Srole (1956) and Dean's (1968) scales of anomie were incorporated and translated into Persian. The answers were arranged on five point Likert format from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). Psychology and sociology professors validated the scale in Persian language. Some of the items are as follows: "The only thing that one can be sure of today is that he can be sure of nothing", "there is little use writing to public officials because often they aren't really interested in the problems of the average man". Alpha Cronbach of the scale was 0.82.

Authoritarianism scale - After reviewing famous scales (e.g. Altemeyer, 1998 and Adorno et al., 1950), and based on socio-cultural and political spheres of Iran, 12 items were chosen to prepare an Iranian version of the scale. The items have minimal bias to participants. Like anomie, translation of the test was validated by 5 English language experts, and the content validity of the test was confirmed by experts. Some items are as follows: "people should obey their superiors whether or not they think they are right", "It is good that nowadays young people have greater freedom 'to make their own rules' and to protest against things they don't like". Answers of items were on 5-point Likert scale from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree). Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.83.

Subjective Socioeconomic status scale - Subjective Socioeconomic Scale of Nabavi, Hosseinzade, and Hosseini (2009) was used that has 6 items. In this scale, series of questions about perception of individuals about their social class and self-evaluation about positions in social structure were asked. In fact, individuals should rate themselves into different social classes subjectively that could be different from their real social class. Example of items are "how do you think people evaluate your father's job?" and the answers were in 5-point Likert format from 'very valuable' to 'very valueless'. "If people were classified into five social classes (very high, high, middle, low, and very low), in which social class do you consider your family". The answers were in 5-point Likert format as well from 'very high' to 'very

low'. Cronbach's alpha of the scale was 0.71 (Nabavi et al. 2009). In addition, cronbach's alpha of the scale in the present study was 0.75.

Objective socioeconomic status - Objective socioeconomic status is a realistic evaluation of position of individuals in the society. Objective socioeconomic status is usually measured by standards of life quality such as income, wealth, and level of education (Ritzer, 2005). To assess the objective socioeconomic status, the participants' monthly income was asked in term of Toman (roughly 1000 Toman add up to 1 US\$) which ranged between 100,000 to 1000,000 Toman (100 US\$ to 1000 US\$). After that, the income was divided by 100,000 to range them from 1 to 10. Moreover, educational level of father and mother was asked in years (e.g. 0 for illiterate, 12 for high school diplomas, and 18 for master degrees). Total score of the objective socioeconomic status was obtained by summing the score of income and mother and father education.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Means and standard deviations of anomie and authoritarianism are presented in Table 1. According to Table 1, the mean score for authoritarianism is 30.87 and the mean score for feeling of anomie is 35.8, both higher than half of the total scores of the scales. These two descriptive statistics suggest that anomie and authoritarianism are high in the sample of the study.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the objective and subjective dimensions of socioeconomic status, parental control and authoritarianism

	Object. SES	Subj. SES	anomie	Authoritarianism
Mean	23.15	15.86	35.08	30.87
Std. Deviation	11.48	4.34	9.28	8.33
Minimum	1	5	13	13
Maximum	46	25	65	59
Maximum score of the scale	50	25	65	60

Inferential Statistics

As Table 2 shows, all correlations among variables are significant in the expected directions. Both dimensions of socioeconomic status have significant correlations with authoritarianism. The correlations between objective and subjective dimensions of SES and authoritarianism are $r = -0.266$ ($p < 0.01$) and $r = -0.244$ ($p < 0.01$) respectively. Similarly, both dimensions of SES have significant correlations with feeling of anomie ($r = -0.159$, $p < 0.01$; $r = -0.188$, $p < 0.01$, for objective and subjective dimensions respectively). The lower socioeconomic status, the higher authoritarian tendencies and feelings of anomie among students. In addition, feeling of anomie and authoritarianism are significantly correlated ($r = 0.450$, $p < 0.01$).

Table 2. Correlations between SES, anomie and authoritarianism

	Subjective class	Anomie	Authoritarianism
Objective SES	$r = 0.352^{**}$	$r = -0.159^{**}$	$r = -0.266^*$
Subjective SES	-	$r = -0.188^{**}$	$r = -0.244^{**}$
Anomie	-	-	$r = 0.450^{**}$

** $p < 0.01$

To examine the casual relationships between variables according to our theoretical model, two regressions were carried out. In equation 1, anomie was regressed on subjective and objective dimensions of socioeconomic status and a significant result was obtained, $R^2 = .04$, $F(2, 379) = 8.95$, $p < .0001$. As shown in Table 3, objective SES was a significant predictor, $B = -.08$, $SE = .04$, $\beta = -.10$, $t = -1.98$, $p < .05$, and subjective SES was also a significant predictor of anomie, $B = -.322$, $SE = .11$, $\beta = -.15$, $t = -2.80$, $p < .01$.

Table 3. Standard multiple regression analyses between objective and subjective socioeconomic status (predictor variables) and anomie (dependent variable)

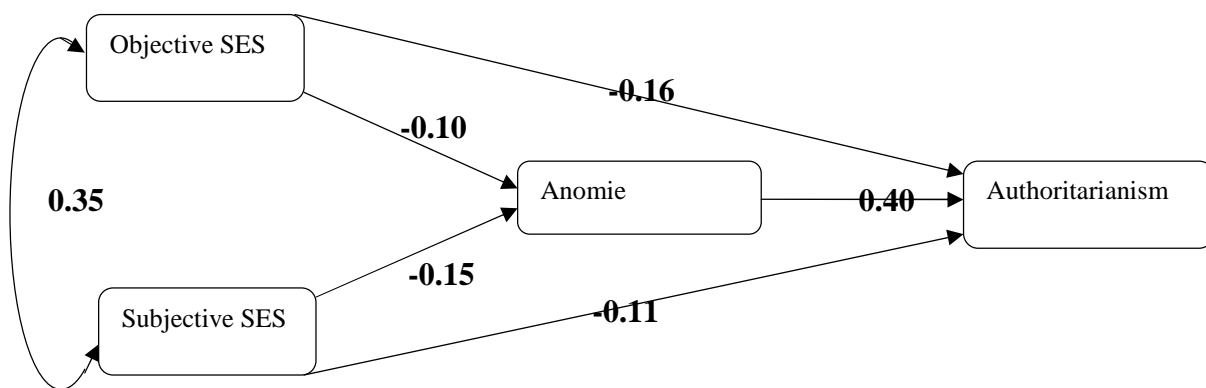
Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	42.173	1.802	-	23.398	.000
Objective	-.086	.043	-.106	-1.980	.048
Subjective	-.322	.115	-.150	-2.803	.005

In equation 2, authoritarianism was regressed on subjective and objective dimensions of socioeconomic status and anomie. This equation explained 25.2 percent of the variance in authoritarianism, $R^2 = .252$, $F(3, 378) = 42.44$, $p < .0001$. According to Table 4, objective SES was a significant predictor, $B = -.11$, $SE = .03$, $\beta = -.16$, $t = -3.40$, $p < .01$, as well as subjective SES, $B = -.21$, $SE = .09$, $\beta = -.11$, $t = -2.30$, $p < .05$. Anomie also was found to be a significant predictor of authoritarianism, $B = .36$, $SE = .04$, $\beta = .40$, $t = 8.86$, $p < .0001$.

Table 4. Standard multiple regression analyses between objective and subjective socioeconomic status and anomie (predictor variables) and authoritarianism (dependent variable)

Variables	B	SE	Beta	t	Sig
Constant	24.282	2.243	-	10.824	.000
Objective	-.118	.035	-.163	-3.408	.001
Subjective	-.213	.092	-.111	-2.309	.021
Anomie	.362	.041	.403	8.862	.000

Figure 1. Model for developing authoritarianism from socioeconomic status with mediating effect of anomie.



DISCUSSION

In the current article we intend to examine the association of socioeconomic status, anomie, and authoritarianism as well as the mediating effect of anomie in SES's relationship with authoritarianism. The results support the hypotheses in the expected direction. Significant negative correlations between socioeconomic status and authoritarianism confirmed Lipset's theory (1959; 1960) in Iran. Finding significant negative correlations between socioeconomic status and feeling of anomie is also concordant with other studies (e.g. Menard, 1995; Carr & Hauser 1976). The correlation between anomie and authoritarianism also was significant

and positive which indicates higher feeling of anomie is associated with higher authoritarian tendency. Table 5 compares the obtained correlation between these two variables in current research and other studies.

Table 5. Correlations between anomie and authoritarianism in other studies and present research

Srole	Robert & Rokeach	McDill	Mulford	Lutterman & Middleton	Present study
0.45	0.47	0.67	0.43	0.24	0.45

Srole (1956) believes that for Fromm and Merton social dysfunction is the independent variable and “change in personality (Fromm) or modes of adaptive (Merton) is the dependent variable” (p. 716). In this study, these propositions were verified. The causal relationship between anomie and authoritarianism was cited in Srole’s (1956) study. By referring to Fromm and Merton's views, Srole (1956) stated that:

“To Fromm... escape reactions from socially generated “aloneness” and “helplessness” [i.e. individual anomie] may issue either in authoritarianism or “compulsive conformity”. For Merton, “individual modes of adaptation” to dysfunctional “contradiction in the cultural and social structure” is differentiated on the basis of deviancy, including ritualism hypothesized as a dominant type” (Srole, 1956, p. 716).

Another important aspect of these findings relate to Iranian society. Authoritarianism has always been one of the main problems of Iran throughout its history, and this issue has been addressed only theoretically from political viewpoint by intellectuals of Iran. They are looking for authoritarianism roots within political elites. Precisely, it was found that authoritarianism reproduces itself in the context of socioeconomic status and also through the mediating effect of anomie. Thus, the findings help to explain the roots of authoritarianism in Iranian society and its reproduction mechanism within socioeconomic status. Unfortunately, these factors have not been given enough attention regarding the socio-political problems of Iran.

In addition, participants obtained high authoritarianism and anomie scores where the mean of authoritarianism and anomie was more than half of the maximum score of the scale. It implies the seriousness of these two problems in the Iranian community. Accordingly, Ji and Suh (2008), by comparing Korean students with American students, stated that Asian countries have more authoritarian submission and aggression. In fact, Korean students were more compliant to authority, more aggressive to out-groups and less conservative in their social beliefs in comparison with American students.

Moreover, high anomie score was obtained as well. This result can be explained by historical changes of Iran. After 1979 revolution, Iran has faced with major structural and cultural changes which have come along with rapid population growth, eight years war with Iraq, international blockades, expansion of the mass media, and qualitative expansion of higher education facilities. Society members need to adapt to the vast major changes, and a feeling of anomie can be a consequence of lack of adaptation to these major changes. This explanation is consistent with Durkheimian approach toward anomie. According to Durkheim, rapid vast social changes can be a cause of anomie.

Beta coefficients suggested that anomie can mediate the relationship between SES and authoritarianism. This finding can extend working class authoritarianism theory. Insecurity

can produce a feeling of anomie and one of the harmful outputs of this feeling can be authoritarianism.

Although Lipset's theory of authoritarianism has been considered in some empirical studies, we encountered a lack of investigation about variables mediating between these two constructs. In spite of doing some experimental investigations about the relations between anomie and authoritarianism, there is no unique experimental study about the relation between anomie and authoritarianism and their association with socioeconomic status; except for the implications of Sheepers et al.'s (1992) study for the relationship between anomie and authoritarianism that does not have a good theoretical explanation. The current study can help to fill this gap in the authoritarianism literature.

CONCLUSION?

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