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## Conceptualization of Religious Belonging of Christian Youth in Higher Education Institutions

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### Abstract

A phenomenological study was conducted to explore the lived experience of Christian students in HEC recognized private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to find out how the religious belonging of Christian youth influences their lives within their university. Qualitative research method was used for this study. Using phenomenology as the strategy of inquiry, in-depth interviews were conducted with a total of six participants including three girls and three boys currently studying in the University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore. The findings of the study revealed that the university did not ask the students about their religion, specifically. So, the students did not experience any discrimination at the time of admission. However, due to the lack of information about religious minority students, they were compelled to study Islamic studies as a subject. Due to their religious belonging Christian students experienced stereotypical behavior, such as some Christian students reported that their Muslim fellows avoided them and hesitated to share their meals with them after knowing their religious affiliation. Majority (4 out of 6) of the students did not experience any biased behavior from their teachers but some students did face biased behavior after revealing their religious affiliation. So, this study suggests that universities should ask students about their religious belonging and considering the needs of religious minority students, curriculum should seek input from religious minority groups. In order to promote religious tolerance at HEIs, universities should design curriculum for all students incorporating contents of interreligious harmony. Higher Education Commission (HEC) should ensure the implementation of policy regarding religious minorities at institutional level.

**Keywords:** affiliation, belonging, Christian, higher education, students, youth

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## Introduction

This study aims to explore the experience of Christian students in order to find out the influence of their religious belonging on their student life within the confines of HEC recognized private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) of Lahore, Pakistan. Pakistan is a land of cultural, ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. 95-96% of the population of Pakistan is Muslim, comprising 80% Sunni and 20% Shia Muslims. Christians, Hindus (including Jains), *Zikris*, the *Ahmadiyya*, Sikhs, the Baha'i, Buddhists, *Parsis*, the Mehdi Foundation and Jews together makeup about 4-5% of the population and these are the main religious minority groups in Pakistan<sup>1</sup>. Including Baloch, *Muhajir*, Punjabis, Pushtuns and *Sindhis*, there are five major ethno-regional communities in Pakistan. Ahmadis, Christians, Hindus, *Kalasha*, *Parsis*, Sikhs, and *Shia* Muslim sects including *Ismailis* and *Bohras* are minority religious and sectarian groups currently found in Pakistan.<sup>2</sup> This demographic composition reflects that Pakistan is a multicultural country comprising different religious, cultural and ethnic communities and this fact requires patience and acceptance of people toward each other for the smooth functioning of the society.

As there are different religious and ethnic minority groups living in Pakistan, so in order to create tolerance for minorities and also to encourage them to participate for societal good, laws were made for minority groups in the constitution of Pakistan. According to the constitution of 1973 as in article 2-A, minorities should be provided with a secure environment where they can freely practice their culture and religion. The constitution also mentioned that the state should ensure the representation of minorities in provincial and federal services, provide them with legitimate rights and also protect their interests.

On the basis of *Qur'ānic* jurisprudence, non-Muslims are divided into four categories including the *Dhimmi*, *Mu'ahid*, *Muhadin*, and *Muharib*. Religious minorities in a Muslim state are known as *Dhimmi*, which literally translates into protected people. *Dhimmis* are non-Muslims who live in an Islamic country and are also subject to the laws of the country. An Islamic government is obliged to

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<sup>1</sup>Shaun Gregory, and Simon R. Valentine, "Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' Report*. (Write net: UK, 2009).

<sup>2</sup>Iftikhar H. Malik, *Religious Minorities in Pakistan* Vol. 6 (London: Minority Rights Group International, 2002).

protect their lives, honor, freedom and property.<sup>3</sup> Non-Muslims living under an Islamic government are required to pay a tax known as *Jiziyah* which incorporates the cost and embodies the reward that an Islamic government receives for the protection of their rights. It is similar to the *Zakat* tax that Muslims are required to pay. The amount of *Jiziyah* depends on the status of the payee. Muslim governments are bound to return the *Jiziyah* if they fail to protect the rights of minorities. Paying *Jiziyah* is not compulsory for everyone and women, children, elderly, disabled, poor and monks are exempt from paying it. When it comes to the technicalities related to *Jiziyah*, we can refer to the verse 29 of *Surah al-Tawbah*, “Fight those who do not believe in Allah or in the Last Day and who do not consider unlawful what Allah and His Messenger have made unlawful and who do not adopt the religion of truth from those who were given the Scripture – [fight] until they give the *jizyah* willingly [‘*anyadin*’] while they are humbled [ṣāghirūn].”<sup>4</sup>

If we analyze the position of minorities in Islam, we can see that there is a clear stance about minorities living under a Muslim government and that government needs to provide them with freedom and is obliged to protect their rights. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was also against oppression and he said that if anyone did something wrong with a non-Muslim, he will personally persecute that person on the Day of Judgment, as it is being quoted, “Whoever wrongs a peaceful non-Muslim or infringes his rights, I will personally persecute him on the Day of Judgment.”<sup>5</sup>

## 1.2. Belongingness and Minority

Jaonna Pfaff-Czarnecka described three dimensions of belongingness including commonality, reciprocity (mutuality) and attachment. According to her, commonality is a multidimensional phenomenon. She defined commonality as the perception of sharing cultural forms including values, experience, memory constructions, language, religion, and lifestyle.<sup>6</sup> Christian community of Pakistan has their distinct position in the social structure due to their own religion, life style and shared cultural norms and values. These elements give them a different identity

<sup>3</sup>Saba Mahmood, “Religious Freedom, the Minority Question, and Geopolitics in the Middle East,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 2 (2012): 418-446.

<sup>4</sup>Al-Quran: al-Tawbah 29

<sup>5</sup>Sunan Abi Dawud

<sup>6</sup>Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, “Multiple Belonging and the Challenges to Biographic Navigation,”(2013),

[https://www.unibielefeld.de/soz/personen/pfaff/downloads/PfaffCzarnecka\\_ISA\\_eSymposium.pdf](https://www.unibielefeld.de/soz/personen/pfaff/downloads/PfaffCzarnecka_ISA_eSymposium.pdf)

and also a unique position in the social structure of Pakistan. Hence, we can say that both religion and ethnicity are included in the ascribed status of any person. This is due to the fact that when a child is born, he/she inherits both religion and ethnicity from his/her family. To provide a sense of belonging is one of the primary functions of religion according to Baumeister (1991). So, being a minority religion gives Christian community a sense of belonging within the group and also provides them with a deep sense of unity.

Shared feelings among people enforce the second dimension of belongingness, that is, reciprocity. Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka said that norms that enforce mutual expectations and obligations create the norms of reciprocity, loyalty, and commitment. The members of a marginalized community are expected to show particular behaviors that do not harm their community existence in the society. In Pakistan, Christians are treated as second class citizens because people consider them inferior in status, give them derogatory names, they have less opportunities to climb the socioeconomic ladder and also face the threat of being targeted with blasphemous cases. These facts ultimately restrict their social behavior and limit their participation in society and they do not questioned the norms of society due to religious intolerance and injustice.

In defining group boundaries marking the difference between “us and them” as well as in-group and out-group, both religion and ethnicity collectively play a key role. According to the research conducted by Rehman (2010), due to their distinct and lower position in society under the suppression of Muslim majority, in their history the Christian minority has faced discrimination at socioeconomic level and they are not seen as a part of the mainstream of the society.

The third dimension of belongingness is attachment; it links people to the material and the immaterial world including spaces and sites, to natural objects, landscapes and to material possessions. For example, church for Christians has a prime religious importance because in it they worship and attend congregations. Attachment can be considered in terms of the membership of any group, either religious or ethnic.

Pfaff-Czarnecka (2013) defined belongingness as the position in social structure that can be experienced through connectedness, identification and attachments.

The definition of belongingness by Pfaff-Czarneckais characterized by the social location of a particular group in the whole social system.<sup>7</sup> Multiple groups

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<sup>77</sup>Joanna Pfaff-Czarnecka, “Multiple Belonging and the Challenges to Biographic Navigation,” 13.

in any social system can be differentiated into two categories, that is, dominant and non-dominant groups. Dominant group comprises the majority of the population such as Muslims in Pakistan and it also has impact on the government. On the other hand, non-dominant groups include groups with a small population such as Pakistani Christians and such groups are less powerful. There are many inequalities in society that Christians face both at institutional and at individual level including institutional degradation, forced conversions, social stigmatization, physical attacks and psychological insecurity.

According to the report on the situation of religious minorities, the Christian community is the second largest religious community by population in Pakistan<sup>8</sup> and they have their distinct position in the social structure due to their own religion, lifestyle, shared cultural norms and values. Although the constitution of Pakistan gives rights to minorities but there is still a need of practically implementing the laws and of making policies to provide minorities with a better life. Pakistan is ranked 8<sup>th</sup> in the list of countries where minorities are under threat according to the 2016 report of Minority Rights Group International. These minority groups include Christians, *Shi'a*, Ahmadis, Hindus, etc. Out of all of these minority communities, Christians are the most discriminated against and oppressed both at social and official levels. So, the current study is an attempt to explore the experience of students belonging to Christianity.

Violence prevails against Christians in the Pakistani society in the form of terrorist attacks and mob attacks. Moreover, in the education sector there is an increasing dropout rate at primary level among Christians and curriculum contains prejudice against minorities. Hence, it is the need of the hour to discover the experience of Christian youth currently studying in private HEIs in order to investigate how their religious affiliation influences their lives. These students are a small percentage of the Christian community who earn the privilege of entering HEIs due to hard work.

Through this study, the aim is to divert the attention of authorities toward HEIs, specifically private universities, to build an environment for minority students such as Christians, Sikhs, Hindus and others so that they can feel better and content with themselves while studying in their respective institution. The findings of this research also highlight the point of view of educated youth about

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<sup>8</sup>Shaun Gregory, and Simon R. Valentine, "Pakistan: The Situation of Religious Minorities," *United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Report*, (Write net: UK, 2009).

their religious belonging. This study also explores the challenges and issues Christian youth are facing in academic institutions due to their religious belonging.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Pakistan and Religious Minorities

According to the Asian Human Rights Commission Report (2010), the situation of human rights in Pakistan is most serious in the Asian region and it also has a great impact on regional and international peace and security. Over time, Pakistan has faced many challenges such as floods, famine, government failure and corruption, terrorism, minority rights violation, etc. The report highlighted the human rights situation of eleven Asian countries including Nepal, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Burma, Indonesia, India, South Korea, Philippines, Thailand and Cambodia and concluded that human rights situation in all these eleven countries is not satisfactory and their respective governments need to invest more in human rights provision to the general public and specifically minorities.<sup>9</sup>

Anjum and Tariq (2012) conducted a research in which they analyzed the role of Christians in the freedom movement of Pakistan. According to the researchers, at the time of partition Christians supported Muslims because they thought or believed that Pakistan will provide a safe environment to minorities and will ensure the provision of fundamental and religious rights to its people. Christians stood with Muslims because they believed that the Pakistani society would be more secular than India's cast ridden society.<sup>10</sup>

Naveed, Munir and Saeed (2014) conducted a study in which they explored the situation of religious minorities living in Lahore. This study revealed that minorities in Lahore are living in the worst conditions because they face abuse from general public and negligence from state institutions. The study also highlighted the problems and difficulties Christians face in securing employment, health facilities and at places of worship.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Asian Human Rights Commission, "The State of Human Rights in Eleven Asian Nations-2010: Bangladesh, Burma, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand," January 1, 2011.

<sup>10</sup>Shahnaz Tariq, "The Role of Christians in the Freedom Movement of Pakistan: An Appraisal," *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences (PJSS)* 32, no. 2 (2012).

<sup>11</sup>Azhar Hussain, Ahmad Salim, and Arif Naveed, *Connecting the Dots: Education and Religious Discrimination in Pakistan: A Study of Public Schools and Madrassas* (United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, 2011).

## 2.2 Religion and Socialization

A study conducted by Burkett (1977)<sup>12</sup> examined the relationship between parents' religious affiliation and moral and religious values of adolescents. The researcher used the survey method for data collection. The findings of the research revealed that parents and children with more involvement in religion or religious activities have more check regarding the use of marijuana and alcohol. The results also showed that parents and adolescents with firm religious beliefs are less likely to use alcohol and marijuana.<sup>13</sup>

Jessica Jacobson (1997) conducted a study in which she examined the relationship between religious and ethnic identity and also investigated them as far as social identity is concerned; why religion is more important than ethnicity for British Pakistani young people. The results of the study showed two significant indicators by British Pakistani youth between ethnicity and religion. For British Pakistani Muslims, Islam has universal importance and Pakistani nationality has a particular importance. The findings also showed that among young British Pakistanis, social boundaries which contain expressions of religious identity are clear cut. British Pakistani young people consider religion as a major source of identity for themselves.<sup>14</sup>

Kim and Wilcox (2014) assessed parents' religious participation, identity and how these helped parents to control their children. The results showed that parents with greater religious participation monitor their children's activities and routine and also establish rules about sexual morality and about television shows. Parents' religious participation and identity both play a role in how parents control and supervise their adolescents. The study findings showed that parents who attend religious services regularly are keener about their children's wellbeing, invest emotionally more and also guide their children about morality.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Steven R. Burkett, "Religion, Parental Influence, and Adolescent Alcohol and Marijuana Use," *Journal of Drug Issues* 7, no. 3 (1977): 263-273.

<sup>13</sup>Steven R. Burkett, "Religion, Parental Influence, and Adolescent Alcohol and Marijuana Use," 263-273.

<sup>14</sup>Jessica Jacobson, "Religion and Ethnicity: Dual and Alternative Sources of Identity among Young British Pakistanis," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 20, no. 2 (1997): 238-256.

<sup>15</sup>Young-II Kim, and W. Bradford Wilcox, "Religious Identity, Religious Attendance, and Parental Control," *Review of Religious Research* 56, no. 4 (2014): 555-580.



### 2.3. Religion and Identity

Gorinas (2014) conducted a study in which she analyzed the relationship between employment and ethnic identity. In her research, she also explored different dimensions including majority norms, the native-immigrant gap and ethnic identity. Her research found that with the degree of religion, ethnicity can only be measured and there is no systematic relation between employment results and ethnic identity.<sup>16</sup>

A research by Tessler (1987) investigated how minorities are treated in non-secular states. In his study, he focused on the Jewish community living in non-secular states including Tunisia and Morocco. The results showed that minorities in secular states are treated better than in non-secular states. In secular states minorities are considered acceptable units but in non-secular states minorities strive for acceptance and also maintain a clear sense of community by practicing a combination of both original and borrowed traditions.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.4 Belonging and Academic Pattern

A study was conducted to assess the relationship between social belonging and academic and health outcomes of minority students. The researchers examined through intervention the sense of social belonging in African American students over the course of three years. These students constitute a socially marginalized group in academia. The study revealed that intervention improved self-reported health and well-being of African American students as the number of visit to doctors decreased and it also improved their academic performance.<sup>18</sup>

A phenomenological study was conducted by Schuemann (2014) in which she explored the experience of students and their understanding of university presidency. To explore the experience of students the researcher interviewed 10 students who were involved in extracurricular activities and also had occasional interaction with their university president. The study revealed that through interaction with the president, the students experienced meaningful and impactful

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<sup>16</sup>Cédric Gorinas, "Ethnic Identity, Majority Norms, and the Native-Immigrant Employment Gap," *Journal of Population Economics* 27, no. 1 (2014): 225-250.

<sup>17</sup>Mark A. Tessler, "The Identity of Religious Minorities in non-secular states: Jews in Tunisia and Morocco and Arabs in Israel," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20, no. 3 (1978): 359-373.

<sup>18</sup>Gregory M. Walton, and Geoffrey L. Cohen, "A Brief Social-Belonging Intervention Improves Academic and Health Outcomes of Minority Students," *Science* 331, no. 6023 (2011): 1447-1451.

memories and they started to feel connected with the university and it also enhanced their involvement within the campus.<sup>19</sup>

A study was conducted on promoting tolerance and enhancing religious understanding in education by Nayyar, Shah and Khan (2009) in which the researchers examined extracurricular activities, physical and social environment of schools and the attitude of students, teachers and parents toward religious minorities. The study revealed that, in general, public schools do not promote religious intolerance. Extracurricular activities including annual functions, debates or dramas are not generally inducing religious intolerance. They also reported that teachers and community members never feel that schools promote discrimination, extremism and intolerance. However, the results also showed that schools do not foster the understanding of religious tolerance and in debates or extracurricular activities, schools do not display the content that can help students in understanding other faiths.

A study was conducted by Goodenow (1993) which examined the relationship between classroom belonging and motivational and achievement levels of early adolescent students. The researcher analyzed a class of students and the results showed that teachers' support has a significant effect on girls' motivation as compared to boys. The findings of the study suggested that the sense of belonging and interpersonal support are significant for academic motivation and achievements.<sup>20</sup>

Faircloth conducted a qualitative research in which he analyzed the relationship between the senses of school of adolescents and the integration of their identity with English assignments. The research disclosed that adolescents feel a sense of belonging and attachment in school or classroom when they participate in different activities designed by the teacher with a particular focus on students' own culture and identity.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>Kahler B. Schuemann, "A Phenomenological Study into how Students Experience and Understand the University Presidency," (PhD Dissertation: Western Michigan University, 2014)

<http://scholarworks.wmich.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1263&context=dissertations>

<sup>20</sup> Carol Goodenow, "Classroom Belonging among Early Adolescent Students: Relationships to Motivation and Achievement," *The Journal of Early Adolescence* 13, no. 1 (1993): 21-43.

<sup>21</sup>Beverly S. Faircloth, "Making the Most of Adolescence: Harnessing the Search for Identity to Understand Classroom Belonging," *Journal of Adolescent Research* 24, no. 3 (2009): 321-348

### 3. Methodology

Qualitative research method was used in this study.<sup>22</sup> Phenomenological research design was used to get the insight of participants about their lived experience in private HEIs of Lahore. Phenomenology is basically the study of lived experience and since the objective of this study was to find out the lived experience of Christian students, their respective position in HEIs, behaviors they faced because of their religious belonging and to investigate how being a religious minority shaped their choices related to academia, so phenomenology was considered as the research design best suited for this study. It allowed the researchers to get an insight into the Christian students' experience of university life.

For the current study, it was difficult to identify and locate the sample because the majority of the students of HEIs belongs to the Muslim community. It was hard to locate Christian students; therefore, the study adopted the snowball sampling technique. Using<sup>23</sup> snowball sampling six Christian participants were identified and interviewed. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, in-depth interview technique was opted for data collection. Through thematic analysis, five themes were extracted from the collected data.

#### 3.1 Ethical Considerations

For the current study, in order to interview the participants, interview guidelines were prepared along with the written consent form<sup>24</sup> in which the purpose and benefits of the research were described. Consent form ensured the respect of the participants, that they were not forced to participate and had due information about the research prior to being a part of it. The consent form also ensured the participants that the information would be used only for academic purposes and the identity of the participants would not be disclosed<sup>25</sup>. Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the names of the universities were not disclosed in this research. Instead of using their real names, the researcher used the label "Urban University" as a dummy name in this research.

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<sup>22</sup>Jennifer Mason, *Qualitative Researching* (Sage, 2017).

<sup>23</sup>John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* (London and Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2009).

<sup>24</sup>Anjum Halai, "Ethics in Qualitative Research: Issues and Challenges," (2006).

<sup>25</sup>Katherine Fritz, "Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research," Retrieved May 29 (2008): 2009:

[https://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp4.pdf/at\\_download/file.pdf](https://www.edqual.org/publications/workingpaper/edqualwp4.pdf/at_download/file.pdf)

#### 4. Analysis and Discussion

The purpose of the study was to explore the issues and challenges Christian students face in private HEIs with a special focus on the admission process as well as teacher and peer behavior with regard to their religious belonging. To achieve the objectives of the study, the researcher conducted in-depth interviews with Christian students currently studying in University of Management and Technology (UMT), Lahore. In the light of the results of in-depth interviews and related literature, the following debate was generated.

##### 4.1 Theme 1: Religious Belonging

Belongingness represents the ownership of any group. It can also be experienced through connectedness, attachment and identification. According to Anthias (2013), when people share common values, rituals and relations in the society they feel that they belong together.<sup>26</sup> Religion is a most important part of identity. Durkheim said that religion acts as a source of identification and solidarity for individuals in the society. Christian students consider religion a part of their identity and they mention that religion defines customs and living patterns for them. They feel a sense of commonality with other members of their religious group, a sense of attachment with church and responsible for their actions that could not harm their group existence in the society. Durkheim saw religion as a critical part of the social system; however, religion in Pakistan occupies a prime position in all institutions of society. One participant mentioned that

*“I think in Pakistan people recognize us from our religious belonging, that’s why religion is an important part of my life. From religious practices to daily life dealing, religion guides us as if religion has explained to us each and everything.”*

##### 4.2 Theme 2: Admission Process

According to the research by Jivan and Jacob (2012), almost 27% students face problems due to their religious identity while getting admission at school, college and university and 51% study Islamic studies during their educational period.<sup>27</sup> Another study found that at school level religious minorities are forced to learn

<sup>26</sup>Floya Anthias, “Identity and Belonging: Conceptualisations and Political Framings,” *Nordic Journal of Migration Research*2, no. 2 (2013): 102-110.

<sup>27</sup>Jennifer Jag Jivan, and Peter Jacob, “Life on the Margins: a Study on Minority Women in Pakistan,” February 2012.

and hear Qur'ān.<sup>28</sup> Most of the students did not experience any problem while getting admission in HEIs but some reported that they were not properly guided by the admission office about the minority scholarship.

A participant said about the admission process,

*“When I came here for admission I asked the admission office for minority scholarship and almost three to four officials denied any scholarship, while one person from another administrative department guided me about the scholarship. So, I received 50% scholarship in this institution. I don't think that other minority students know about this scholarship because admission office does not give information about it.”*

According to another participant,

*“I chose my study field because of my interest and did not face any difficulty in getting admission. The daughter of my father's friend suggested me this institution. She said that this university is good as compared to other private universities in term of its education and environment since its environment is secure for girls. While studying here, I studied Islamic studies because the department did not give me any other option.”*

In the selection of the study area, the students did not experience any issue. However, while studying in the university some minority students were forced to study Islamic studies as a subject because they were not given any other option. The current study reaffirms the results of the previous study that students face problems in getting admission and they are forced to study Islamic studies as a subject.

### 4.3 Theme 3: Disclosing Religious Belonging

The issue of information management is common among invisible identity categories

Individuals with different religion identities, sexual orientation, chronic illness, mental illness, and disability etc. tend to conceal their identities from others. People with invisible identities hesitate to disclose them.<sup>29</sup> Religious minorities can't declare their identity openly. Most of the students hesitate to

<sup>28</sup>Asma Yunus, Neha Riaz Khan, and Zaheer Ali, “Exploring the Patterns of Perceived Discrimination among Hindu and Christians Minorities, Regarding Educational Opportunities,” *International Journal of Asian Social Science* 2, no. 12 (2012): 2186-2194.

<sup>29</sup>Joy E. Beatty, and Susan L. Kirby, “Beyond the Legal Environment: How Stigma Influences Invisible Identity Groups in the Workplace,” *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal* 18, no. 1 (2006): 29-44.

disclose their religious belonging to their fellow students because they fear that their fellow students may avoid them or it may damage their relationship with others.

*“I never disclose my religious belonging by myself. Nobody asked me about my religion because my name is like other Muslim girls names. So, people never get the real idea about my religion. Actually, I always hesitate to tell other people about my religion because I think that people like my friends may behave or treat me differently after knowing my religious identity. My parents also said that never hesitate to tell other people about your religion but I don’t know why I always hesitate to tell.”*

Another participant said that:

*“Actually when I came to this university one of my seniors told me that in this institute Christians not treated well, for example Muslims don’t like to be friend with Christians and also degrade Christians. So, that’s why I was very much conscious about revealing my identity and it took me a year to tell my fellows about my religion.”*

So, Christian students also experienced information management issues regarding their religious belonging because they considered that revealing their religious belonging to others may threaten their position in the educational institution and only revealed themselves as Christians after getting to know the mentality of their fellows about their religious group. This is also the reason that some of the students locate and socialize with the same group people inside institutions to feel secure. These findings support the report by Czarnecki (2011).

The findings of the study conducted by Rosen bloom and Way suggested that on the bases of minority beliefs, teachers are biased and harass Asian American students.<sup>30</sup> A study proved that teachers’ expectations as well as positive and negative speech may vary with students’ ethnic background. They concluded that teachers favoring European American students as compared to Latino and African American students was associated with small but statistically significant effects.<sup>31</sup> Some students experience a negative change of behavior in teachers after revealing their religious belonging to them. They also experience a tough time from their

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<sup>30</sup>Susan Rakosi Rosenbloom, and Niobe Way, “Experiences of Discrimination among African American, Asian American, and Latino Adolescents in an Urban High School,” *Youth and Society* 35, no. 4 (2004): 420-451.

<sup>31</sup>Harriet R. Tenenbaum, and Martin D. Ruck, “Are Teachers' Expectations Different for Racial Minority than for European American Students? A Meta-Analysis,” *Journal of Educational Psychology* 99, no. 2 (2007): 253.

teachers who deal with them strictly, for example not cooperating with Christian students regarding their Christmas holidays.

One participant mentioned that:

*“I think due to being a private university, the teachers avoid asking personal questions such as about students’ religion. Last year, I asked my teachers for Christmas holidays. All teachers cooperated with me except one as she did not lessen the work load for me. So, I was burdened with work load on my Christmas festival.”*

Another participant said that:

*“My teachers don’t know about my religion because they never asked me. It’s my first year in the university. Until now, I did not need holidays for any of my Christmas event. But once my Islamic studies teacher asked me so I told him that yes I’m a Christian. However, after that he did not say or did anything that may hurt me.”*

The findings of this study are in line to some extent with previous studies that teachers are biased with religious minority students after getting to know their religious belonging. The majority (60%), however, experienced positive behavior with no biased behavioral change in teachers after revealing their religious belonging to them.

#### 4.4 Theme 4: Peer Behavior

A study suggested that Asian American students face physical and verbal harassment by peers. African American girls and African American and Asian middle school boys reported being the victim of bullying in schools due to their racial/ ethnic differences.<sup>32</sup> Peer group plays an important role in facilitating the sense of belonging.<sup>33</sup> After revealing their religious belonging, some Christian students experienced verbal abuse and isolating behavior from their peers. People of other beliefs (Muslims) refused to share their food or water with them and also verbally abused them.

One participant said about peer behavior that

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<sup>32</sup>Anne L. Sawyer, Catherine P. Bradshaw, and Lindsey M. O’ Brennan, “Examining Ethnic, Gender, and Developmental Differences in the way Children Report being a Victim of “Bullying” on Self-Report Measures,” *Journal of Adolescent Health* 43, no. 2 (2008): 106-114.

<sup>33</sup>Terrell L. Strayhorn, *College Students’ Sense of Belonging: A Key to Educational Success for all Students*. (New York: Routledge, 2012).

*“My all friends are Muslims because my name is similar to other Muslim girls names. So, my friends and fellows did not have any idea about my religion. I told my friends about my religion after two years. I hesitated to tell them because I thought it may affect our friendship bonding. I had very good friends and when I told them about my religious belonging they were surprised but it did not affect our friendship bonding. We still inter-dine, drink water from one bottle and eat from one plate. So, personally I did not face any change of behavior of my friends due to my religion”*

Another participant said that

*“I told my friends after six months. While giving a presentation in class I mentioned my religious identity and my entire group of friends was shocked to know it. After class, when I went back home everyone messaged me to confirm that either I’m Christian or not, for example one friend said that don’t say this, think what are you saying (plz yr ye tu na kaho, plz apny words py gor kro tum kiya kah rhe ho). The time before revealing the identity was really good with my friends. We used to eat from the same bowl and drink water from the same bottle. When they came to know about my identity, all of my friends hesitated to share their things with me. They did not share their food with me and not even their water bottle, for example when I drink water from any bottle they never even touch that bottle.”*

Some reported no change of behavior from their class fellows and friends. Some (50%) of the students did not report any incident of discriminatory behavior from their friends and fellows but to some extent, they experienced offensive behavior from their peers due to the difference of religious belonging.

## 5. Conclusion

Christian students currently studying in a private university of Lahore labelled here as Urban University face certain challenges and issues to some extent due to their religious belonging. This study found that Christian students of Urban University were not asked about their religion during the admission process. This shows that the said university is not limiting the participation of students because of their religion. On the other hand, the lack of concern about religion also influences students negatively because the university does not recognize the needs of Christian students regarding coursework and these students are compelled to study Islamic studies as a subject to complete the credit hours of their degree. The majority of teachers does not ask students about their religious belonging but some teachers show bias toward Christian students. Christian students hesitate to reveal their religious belonging to their class fellows in order to avoid being stereotyped by others. Some Christian students also faced discriminatory behavior from their



peers. This study plays a pivotal role in highlighting the policy implementation gap regarding the rights of the Christian minority of Pakistan.

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