

## Influence of Religion on Life Style and Social Behavior in Christianity Perspective of Malaysian Christian Students

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### ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to explore the religion's influence on lifestyle in Christianity among Christian students. The literature reviewed and the findings of the result will contribute to achieve the main objectives of this study which will be exploring the influence of religion social relations, behavior and lifestyle of people and their basis beliefs about religion in Christianity. The quantitative research approach was applied for the data collection from respondents. Total 200 respondents were selected for data collection from Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Taylor's College Subang Jaya and Sunway University Malaysia and the simple random sampling was used for data collection from respondents. The result showed that most of the Christian students believed in God and majority opinioned that there is life after death.

**KEYWORDS:** Influence of religion, Social behavior, Life after death, Christianity, Malaysian students.

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### INTRODUCTION

Belief in God has shaped people's mind towards certain things including their lifestyles. It is proven by one study (2011) that religion can protect and promote a healthy lifestyle through controlling their health behavior, social support and psychological states as the world's largest religion with 2.1 billion followers, Christianity is chosen to study the religion's influence in the followers' lifestyles (Creel, 2007, Dow, 2007).

Religion comes from Latin word '*religio*' which means 'that which binds us together as people or community (Doetzel, 2001). Religion is a subject that we encounter daily (Cnaan et al., 1991). It is a belief in God and activities related to its (Lim et al., 2010). It is a system concerning one or more deities and incorporating rituals, ceremonies, ethical guidelines and life philosophies (Einolf, 2011, Farmer et al., 2009). Religion adds meaning and purpose to the lives of the followers, helping them to appreciate the past, understand the present and hope for the future as well as giving psychological stability though religion dictates peace and good will, many battles and divisions have taken place (Smith et al., 2004). Scientifically, religion is defined as a set of behavior and a human activity that can be easily accepted. For example, Christianity, Hinduism, Muslim and Sikhism. Lifestyle is the way that you live. Lifestyle also concerns on individuals' social relationships with friends and families, entertainment and dress code.3 Lifestyle also reflects on individuals' behavior controlled by choices resulting from the social environment and the progress of a nation (Petersen et al., 1997).

#### Christianity

Originated from Palestine, Christianity is the world's largest religion with over 2.1 billion followers all over the globe followers of Christianity is called Christians. It centered on the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, Son of God (Petersen et al., 1997). Using the Holy Bible which consists of Old Testament and New Testament as Sacred Book, Christians focus on God and Jesus Christ however they are vary depending on the denominations. The largest denomination is Roman Catholic which centered in Vatican City, Rome. Two other major branches are Eastern Orthodox and Protestant with many denominations within each of these branches.12, 29 Islam and Judaism view Christianity as an Abrahamic Religion (Lim et al., 2010).

Christians believe that there's life after death as God has the power to grant eternal life as how Jesus Christ risen from the death on Easter Sunday. They also believe about the Holy Trinity which accounts for the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit as One. Besides that, Christians also believe that humans are born with the impulse to take negative actions as we are creation of humanity (Petersen et al., 1997).

#### Religion and Relationships

Generally religion has a big impact on a person's relationship with friends and families.21 Research shows that lack of religious belief will lead to women in engaging in uncontrolled premarital sex behavior. According to a research conducted by (Clary et al., 1998) religion influence health through providing a better social support. People will experience social contact with those who are in the same religion and have a web of social relations

that can help and protect whenever necessary. Social networks found in religious congregations also play an important role in implementing behaviors that influence the quality of urban relationships. Study shows that religious rituals such as prayer may also encourage urban parents to be more reflexive about their relationships, and seek to pursue positive behaviors such as affection for partner and avoid negative behavior such as ignoring partner's needs.

Religion also can play an important role in how couples interact and communicate with each other and how they approach the counseling process (Brown *et al.*, 2010). A study was conducted on the effect of religion on romantic relationship. Results shown that Christians with higher religiosity were found to have more commitment in romantic relationship than those with lower religiosity (Wong 2009) Sexual immorality and premarital sex are unacceptable. The only acceptable form of sexual relations, marital sex is suggested in Hebrews. Let married life be honored among all of you and not made unclean; for men untrue in married life will be judged by God (Smidt 2003).

The first relationship on earth is even recorded in the Bible, a book that is used by Christians as their guide (Williams 2011). The relationship between God and man, man and animals and ultimately man and women portrayed as Adam and Eve. The entire Bible actually tells us a story about God's love for His children that He gave his only Son, Jesus so that everyone will have a new relationship in the family of God by grace through faith.<sup>28</sup> In the Book of the Ephesians (Wong 2009). It is written "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church. In Christianity, the Bible told us to love our spouse as how Jesus Christ loved the church and to respect and understand our spouse. Likewise, husbands live with your wives in an understanding way, showing honor to the weaker vessel, since they are heirs with you of the grace of life, so that your prayers may not be hindered (Petersen *et al.*, 1997).

Honor your father and mother, as the LORD your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you." and Ephesians. Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother (this is the first commandment with a promise), "that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land." tell us to honor and obey or parents (Saroglou *et al.*, 2005).

### **Religion and Social Behavior**

The importance of helping others is a common theme in many religious traditions. Helping actions are not just a set of behaviors but also the language that we use to make a sense of such behaviors. There are many studies that found a connection between religiosity and prosocial behavior such as psychological studies of volunteer motivation (Hoge *et al.*, 1995, Smidt, 2003, Lim *et al.*, 2010).

It was showed that those who go to church more often are more likely to do volunteer work as they often felt the influence of divine love to help others. Those who could recall the story of The Good Samaritan and those who stated that their religious beliefs made them more kind and caring were also more likely to volunteer. The story of The Good Samaritan shows us that a difference between our religions does not mean that we can't help others who are not equal with us. It teaches us to help everyone regardless neither their skin colors nor their social status. The religiosity is a subjective matter and a potentially important motivation for helping by translating into action only among individuals who belong to a religious community (Hoge *et al.*, 1995).

"I believe that in living you should not harm yourself and not harm other people, and beyond that do things that are good for yourself and do things that are good for other people, and I think there's kind of a progression there, and I think that religions help you along the way. I think that the purpose of religion is to bring out the good and to suppress the evil that's in all of us." Both statements were taken from a survey conducted to identify the relationship between religion and volunteering. The practice of religion also promotes better mental health which including less depression and more self-esteem and act as an aid in recovering from emotional damage due to substance abuse.<sup>8</sup> Religious belief and practice are among the strongest social forces against most social ill.<sup>8</sup> This is due to the real cause of all these social ills is simply the absence of God which is a definition for the word 'sin'.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, the cure is to introduce God into our lives and into our culture.<sup>8</sup> Research has proven that God is the answer for sin (Smith & Denton 2004).

## **MATERIAL AND METHOD**

The quantitative approach was adopted for this study. The data collection was done from target population of Christian students aged 16 and above studying in Taylor's University Lakeside Campus, Taylor's College Subang Jaya and Sunway University Malaysia. These three institutions were selected as they are among the highly ranking institutions with high number of enrolled students in the capital of Malaysia. Due to financial and time constraints, more institutions were not included as well qualitative part was not included in the study. Moreover, the questions in the questionnaire sufficed for the aim and objectives of the study. A total 200 respondents was selected for data collection and simple random sampling was used.

**Aim and Objectives**

The aim of this study is to explore the religion’s influence on lifestyle in Christianity among Christian students. The literature reviewed in this article will contribute to achieve the main objectives of this study which will be exploring the answers for the following research questions:

- 1) Does religion influence people’s views towards relationship with friends and families?
- 2) Does religion influence people’s social behaviour?
- 3) Do different denominations have different views on religion’s influence on lifestyle?

**RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

**Demographic Profile**

The table 1 result shows 55% of female respondents and 45% of the male respondent participants in this study. While the age of respondents ranged from 16 to 25 years the study revealed that 90% of the respondents’ age was between 16 to 20 years and 10% of the respondents were of 21 to 25 years old. Students were also asked about their marital status and all of the respondents were unmarried. While the 2% of the respondents had education level up to secondary 21% had college level and 77% of the respondents had university level education. Respondents were asked about any job or work during their study and 70% responded that they do not have any job while 25% do a part time job and 5% were unemployed. The result regarding monthly income indicated that 90% of the respondents’ income was less than three thousand Malaysian Ringgit in a month.

**Table 1 Demographic profile**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	110	55
Male	90	45
<b>Age Group</b>		
16-20 years old	180	90
21-25 years old	20	10
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	200	100
Married		
Others		
<b>Education level</b>		
Secondary	4	2
College	42	21
University	154	77
<b>Job/ work</b>		
Student	140	70
Working part time	50	25
Unemployed	10	5
<b>Monthly Income</b>		
Less than 3000	180	90
More than 3 thousand	20	10

**Catholic**

The Table 2 describes the results of Catholic denomination. The data reveals that 15% of the respondents visit church 2 to 3 times in a month while 35% visit in a month and 23% of the respondents visit in a year. Moreover, results show that 25% of the respondents believe in God while 40% sometimes believe in God. The respondents were also asked about the belief in life after death. More than half (i.e.55%) of the respondents said that they not believe that there is life after death and 33% believe in life after death.

Table 2 shows the respondents’ views about the importance of religion in life. More than half (i.e. 62.5%) of the respondents said that there is no any importance of religion in our life while 35% said that there is importance of religion in our life. The respondents were asked about the religion as basis of daily activities. 52% of the respondents responded that there is no any basis of religion on daily activities in their life and 36% of the respondents replied that religion as a basis of daily activities. Respondents were also asked about the influence of religion in relationships of family and friends. The results revealed that 40% of the respondents acknowledge that there is influence of religion in the relationships with friend and family while 30% said that there is no any influence of religion with the relationship of family and friends.

Replying to another question, 40% of the respondents said that there is influence of religion on the dating and sexual relationships while 35% did not believe that there is any influence of religion on dating sexual relationships and 25% were not sure about this matter. In response to another question 45% of the respondents believe that there is influence of religion on social approach in their life while 25% understand that there is no

influence of religion on their social approach and 30% not sure about the influence of religion in social approach. The result regarding influence of religion on volunteering showed 42% believe that there is influence of religion on “voluntary activities.

**Table 2 Religious Belief Catholic**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Frequency of visiting church</b>		
2/3 times a month	30	15
Once a month	70	35
Once a year	46	23
<b>Best expresses beliefs</b>		
I believe in God	50	25
I don't know there is God	20	10
I find myself believing in God sometimes	80	40
I know God exists and I have doubts about it	50	25
<b>Do you believe there's life after death</b>		
Yes	66	33
No	110	55
Not Sure	24	12
<b>Importance of religion in life</b>		
Yes	70	35
No	125	62.5
Not Sure	5	2.5
<b>Religion as basis of daily activities</b>		
Yes	72	36
No	104	52
Not Sure	24	12
<b>Influence of religion on relationships with family and friends</b>		
Yes	80	40
No	60	30
Not Sure	60	30
<b>Influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship</b>		
Yes	80	40
No	70	35
Not Sure	50	25
<b>Influence of religion on social approach</b>		
Yes	90	45
No	50	25
Not Sure	60	30
<b>Influence of religion on volunteering</b>		
Yes	84	42
No	46	23
Not sure	70	35
<b>Influence of religion on entertainment</b>		
Yes	70	35
No	90	45
Not Sure	40	20

### Protestant

The Table 3 describes the results of Protestant denomination. Data from table 3 showed that 26% of the respondents visit church 2-3 times in month while 25% of the respondents visit once a year. The respondents were asked about the belief in God the result indicated that 37% of the respondents believe in God while 34% of the respondents do not know if there is a God. Furthermore, result revealed that 40% of the respondents believe that there is life after death while 35% were not sure that there is life after death. Similarly respondents were investigated about importance of religion in life. The results showed that 42.5% said that there is importance of religion in their life while 32.5% said that there is no importance of religion in their lives and 25% was not sure what the importance of religion in their life. The respondents were also inquired about the religion as basis of daily activities. The result indicated that 38.5% believe that the religion has basis on daily activities and 36% not sure that religion has any basis on daily life activities.

Furthermore, respondents asked about the influence of religion on relationships with family and friends and the result showed that 38.5% said yes there is influence of religion on relationships with family and friends while 25.5% of the respondents said there is no influence of religion on relationships with family and friends. Respondents asked about influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship the result indicated that 38.5% believe that there is any influence of religion on dating and sexual relationship while 32.5% did not believe that

there is influence of religion on dating and sexual relationship. The respondents were also investigated regarding influence of religion on volunteering and the results revealed that 42% said yes there is influence of religion and 31% said that there is no any influence of religion on volunteering. The respondents were asked about the influence of religion on entertainment where the result showed that 42.5% said yes there is influence of religion on entertainment while 38.5% said that there is no influence of religion on entertainment.

**Table 3 PROTESTANT**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Frequency of visiting church</b>		
2/3 times a month	52	26
Once a month	24	12
Once a year	50	25
<b>Best expresses beliefs</b>		
	74	37
I believe in God	68	34
I don't know there is God	40	20
I find myself believing in God sometimes	42	21
I know God exists and I have doubts about it	50	25
<b>Do you believe there's life after death</b>		
Yes	80	40
No	50	25
Not Sure	70	35
<b>Importance of religion in life</b>		
Yes	85	42.5
No	65	32.5
Not Sure	50	25
<b>Religion as basis of daily activities</b>		
Yes	77	38.5
No	51	25.5
Not Sure	72	36
<b>Influence of religion on relationships with family and friends</b>		
Yes	77	38.5
No	51	25.5
Not Sure	72	36
<b>Influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship</b>		
Yes	77	38.5
No	55	32.5
Not Sure	58	29
<b>Influence of religion on social approach</b>		
Yes	70	35
No	69	34.5
Not Sure	61	30.5
<b>Influence of religion on volunteering</b>		
Yes	84	42
No	62	31
Not sure	54	27
<b>Influence of religion on entertainment</b>		
Yes	85	42.5
No	77	38.5
Not Sure	38	19

**Methodist**

The Table 4 describes the results of Methodist denomination and their responses show that 42% of the respondents visit church 2-3 times in a month while 39.5% visit once a month, however only 18.5% of the respondents visit church once a year. The result regarding belief showed that more than half 53% of the respondents believe in God while 18% of the respondents believing in God some time only. 11.5% of the respondents know that God exist but have doubt about it. The respondents were inquired about the believe there is life after death where result indicated that 39.5% of the respondents said yes they believe that there is life after death while 31.5% did not believe after death life.

**Table 4 METHODIST**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
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<b>Frequency of visiting church</b>		
2/3 times a month	84	42
Once a month	79	39.5
Once a year	37	18.5
<b>Best expresses beliefs</b>		
I believe in God	106	53
I don't know there is God	35	17.5
I find myself believing in God sometimes	36	18
I know God exists and I have doubts about it	23	11.5
<b>Do you believe there's life after death</b>		
Yes	79	39.5
No	63	31.5
Not Sure	58	29
<b>Importance of religion in life</b>		
Yes	94	47
No	59	29.5
Not Sure	47	23.5
<b>Religion as basis of daily activities</b>		
Yes	88	44
No	52	26
Not Sure	60	30
<b>Influence of religion on relationships with family and friends</b>		
Yes	90	45
No	69	34.5
Not Sure	42	20.5
<b>Influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship</b>		
Yes	107	53.5
No	42	21
Not Sure	51	25.5
<b>Influence of religion on social approach</b>		
Yes	85	42.5
No	30	15
Not Sure	85	42.5
<b>Influence of religion on volunteering</b>		
Yes	111	55.5
No	34	17
Not sure	55	27.5
<b>Influence of religion on entertainment</b>		
Yes	98	49
No	53	26.5
Not Sure	49	24.5

Data from table 4 indicated that the respondents asked about the importance of religion in life the result revealed that 47% of the respondents said yes that there is importance of religion in their life while 31.5% believe that there is no any importance of religion in their life. However, the respondents also investigated about religion as basis of daily activities the result showed that 44% of the respondents said yes there is religion basis of daily activities in their life and 36% was not sure regarding religion as a basis of daily activities. Furthermore, respondents were asked about influence of religion on relationships with family and friends result showed that 45% of the respondents believe that there is influence of religion on relationships with family and friends and 34.5% of the respondents said that there is no any influence of religion on relationships with family and friends. Similarly respondents were asked regarding influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship the result indicated that more than the half respondents 53.5% believe that there is influence of religion on dating/ sexual relationship.

Furthermore, result showed that 42.5% there is influence of religion on their social approach while similarly 42.5% not sure about the influence of religion on their social approach. The respondents were also inquired about the influence of religion on volunteering the result showed that 55.5% said yes there is influence of religion on volunteering while 27.5% not sure about the religion influence. The result indicated about influence of religion on entertainment result showed that 49% believe that there is influence of religion on entertainment while 26.5% did not believe that there is influence of religion on entertainment.

#### **DID NOT STATE THEIR DENOMINATIONS**

The data from table 5 mentions responses from the respondents who did not state their denomination. The results reveal that 49% of the respondents visit church every week while 29% of the respondents visit 2/3 three times in a month furthermore result indicated that 16.6% visit once a month. However, the result regarding belief in God revealed that more than half of the respondents believe in God and 17.5% believe in God some

time. Furthermore, the respondents were also asked about the life after death where result showed that more than half 56% of the respondents said yes they believe that there is life after death. The respondents were investigated about the importance of religion in life showed that 59.5% of the respondents responded in yes and said that there is importance of religion in life while 25% that there is no any importance of religion in their life

However, 53.5% respondents indicated that religion has basis on daily activities. The respondents were also inquired about the influence of religion on relationships with family and friends the result revealed that 49.5% said that there is influence of religion on relationships with family and friends while 33.5% of the respondents said that there is no any religion influence on relationships with family and friends. The respondents were also asked about the influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship the result showed that 53.5% of the respondents said yes and 29.5% that there is no any influence of religion on dating/sexual relationships.

**Table 5 DID NOT STATE THEIR DENOMINATIONS**

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Frequency of visiting church</b>		
Every week	98	49
2/3 times a month	58	29
Once a month	33	16.6
Once a year	11	5.5
<b>Best expresses beliefs</b>		
I believe in God	112	56
I don't know there is God	0	
I find myself believing in God sometimes	35	17.5
I know God exists and I have doubts about it	53	26.5
<b>Do you believe there's life after death</b>		
Yes	112	56
No	53	26.5
Not Sure	35	17.5
<b>Importance of religion in life</b>		
Yes	119	59.5
No	50	25
Not Sure	31	15.5
<b>Religion as basis of daily activities</b>		
Yes	107	53.5
No	30	15
Not Sure	63	31.5
<b>Influence of religion on relationships with family and friends</b>		
Yes	99	49.5
No	67	33.5
Not Sure	34	17
<b>Influence of religion on dating/sexual relationship</b>		
Yes	107	53.5
No	59	29.5
Not Sure	34	17
<b>Influence of religion on social approach</b>		
Yes	113	56.5
No	50	25
Not Sure	37	18.5
<b>Influence of religion on volunteering</b>		
Yes	115	57.5
No	67	33.5
Not sure	18	9
<b>Influence of religion on entertainment</b>		
Yes	71	35.5
No	103	51.5
Not Sure	26	13

Data from table 5 showed regarding Influence of religion on social approach showed that 56.5% said that there is influence of religion on social approach while 25% said there is no influence of religion on social influence. Moreover, the respondents were also asked about the Influence of religion on volunteering result revealed that 57.5% of the respondents said yes there is influence of religion on volunteering while 33.5% said there is no influence of religion on volunteering. Finally the respondents were asked about the influence of religion on entertainment and the result indicated that more than half 51.5% responded that there is no any influence of religion on entertainment while 35.5% of the respondents said that there is influence of religion on entertainment and 13% of the respondents were not sure about it.

## Conclusion

The result regarding the belief in God show that all Protestants and those who are from other denominations believe in God. The respondents were also asked about the life after that which also showed that majority respondents believe that there is life after death regardless their denominations. They believe like this because of what is stated in the Bible. Approximately 95% of the respondents agree that religion is important in life as it is the basis of their life. Generally, both this survey and research previously have done show similar results. Religion has a big impact on a person's relationship with families and friends as well as for setting a good set of behaviors. Those who didn't mention their denominations agree that religion is important in life. Female and male shows equal responses towards this matter by answering 'Yes'. Young adolescence and young adults also share the same idea by agreeing that religion is important in life.

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