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A Multidimensional Analysis of Socio-Economic, Political, and Health-Related Discrimination Faced by the Christian Community in Punjab, Pakistan

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Abstract

Discrimination against minority communities has been a persistent feature of human societies throughout history. While numerous studies have explored various dimensions of marginalization, religion-based discrimination remains insufficiently examined, particularly in the context of Christian minorities in Pakistan. This study seeks to address this gap by offering a comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic, political, and health-related challenges faced by the Christian community in Punjab. **Aims and Objectives:** This research investigates the multifaceted nature of systemic discrimination against Christians in Pakistan, focusing on economic disparities, political exclusion, cultural segregation, limited access to quality healthcare, and instances of religiously motivated violence. Despite constitutional provisions ensuring equality and religious freedom, these communities continue to encounter significant barriers to full social integration. The primary aim is to evaluate the quality of life of Christian individuals and illuminate the structural and institutional injustices they endure across social, political, economic, and health domains. **Methodology:** Employing a qualitative research design, the study utilized in-depth interviews with 11 Christian women selected through snowball sampling. Supplementary ethnographic observations were conducted to capture the nuanced experiences of social inclusion, healthcare access, and everyday discrimination.

Findings: While interpersonal relations between Christian respondents and members of the religious majority were generally amicable, dissatisfaction was expressed regarding the state's inadequate support for minority religious sites and community development. Most participants were unaware of their political

representation through minority seats in the National Assembly. A lack of access to quality education and employment opportunities emerged as critical obstacles, exacerbated by limited health literacy and substandard healthcare facilities in minority-concentrated localities. **Conclusion:** The study concludes that intersecting factors—such as limited educational attainment, economic marginalization, political underrepresentation, and poor health awareness—contribute to the systemic discrimination faced by the Christian community. Furthermore, internalized marginality and a lack of empowerment among community members hinder collective advancement. Addressing these disparities requires targeted policy interventions, inclusive governance, and the active promotion of minority health, education, and political engagement.

Keywords: Religious Discrimination, Christian Minority, Socio-Economic Marginalization, Political Exclusion, Health Inequality

Introduction

Discrimination against religious minorities has long been a global concern, rooted in historical, cultural, and structural inequalities. Although many academic inquiries have explored various forms of discrimination—such as those based on ethnicity, gender, and class—religious discrimination, particularly in South Asian contexts, remains under-examined. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating the complex, intersectional discrimination faced by the Christian community in Punjab, Pakistan, with a specific focus on socio-economic, political, and health-related dimensions.

Despite being the world's largest religion by followers, Christianity has not been immune to persecution and marginalization, especially in regions where it represents a minority faith. In Pakistan, Christians form a significant religious minority, yet their contributions and rights are often overlooked or suppressed within mainstream socio-political structures. The contradiction between constitutional promises of equality and the lived realities of minority communities is stark, as Christians continue to experience economic deprivation, political underrepresentation, cultural exclusion, limited access to healthcare, and episodes of religiously motivated violence.

Pakistan, while constitutionally committed to religious freedom and minority rights, faces persistent challenges in ensuring equitable treatment for non-Muslim citizens. The Christian minority, in particular, encounters systemic barriers to education, employment, healthcare, and political participation. These challenges are often reinforced by deeply entrenched social prejudices and institutional neglect. For instance, inadequate representation in policymaking, limited awareness of legal rights, and substandard living conditions in segregated neighborhoods reflect the structural nature of this discrimination.

This study does not aim to compare victimhood among different communities but rather to spotlight the specific experiences and consequences of discrimination endured by the Christian minority. By doing so, it contributes to a broader

understanding of religious discrimination as a societal issue, deserving of scholarly and policy attention.

Employing a multidisciplinary lens, this research explores how socio-economic disadvantages, political marginalization, and restricted access to healthcare intersect to shape the lived experiences of Christians in Punjab. It also emphasizes the psychological and social impacts of sustained exclusion, drawing from the perspectives of Christian women—an especially vulnerable segment within this marginalized group.

Ultimately, this study seeks to provoke critical reflection and informed discourse around religious inequality in Pakistan. By illuminating the realities of the Christian minority, it encourages both academic and policy-oriented efforts to create a more inclusive, equitable, and tolerant society. Furthermore, the insights generated here may serve as a foundation for comparative research on religious minorities globally, contributing to international dialogues on social justice and human rights.

2. Statement of the Problem

In the discourse surrounding minority rights in Pakistan, a persistent gap remains between constitutional promises and lived realities. While legal frameworks emphasize equality and religious freedom, religious minorities—particularly the Christian community—continue to face systemic exclusion and marginalization. Their socio-economic, political, and health-related conditions are frequently shaped by entrenched stereotypes, discriminatory practices, and institutional neglect.

Despite their valuable contributions to the nation, Christians in Punjab are often relegated to low-income, menial occupations and denied equitable access to quality education, healthcare, and political representation. Public attitudes tend to reflect a deeply rooted sense of religious superiority, further exacerbating their marginalization. These discriminatory practices hinder the community's upward mobility and compromise their ability to exercise basic human rights.

Although members of the Christian community have long voiced their concerns about unjust treatment (e.g., Adventist Church Report, 1999), these grievances are often overlooked or minimized in mainstream discourse. This study, therefore, seeks to critically examine the socio-economic and political status of Christians in Punjab and explore how intersecting forms of discrimination affect their everyday lives and well-being—particularly in the domains of healthcare, employment, education, and freedom of religious practice.

3. Objectives of the Study

- To examine the socio-economic, political, and religious conditions of Christian community members in Punjab.
- To investigate the nature and extent of discrimination faced by Christians in various domains, including employment, political participation, education, healthcare access, and religious freedom.

- To assess the participants' satisfaction with their ability to freely practice their religion and participate in public life.
- To identify policy-level and community-based strategies for improving the quality of life, well-being, and social inclusion of the Christian minority in Pakistan.

4. Literature Review

Religious minorities in Pakistan, particularly Christians, continue to experience systemic discrimination across social, political, and economic domains. A number of scholars have attempted to explore the multifaceted challenges faced by these communities within the broader context of intolerance, marginalization, and institutional exclusion.

Jan, Rehman, Khattak, and Khan (2019) conducted an empirical study examining the adjustment problems faced by religious minorities—specifically Christians and Sikhs—in the districts of Peshawar and Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Using a five-point Likert scale and chi-square tests, their findings revealed that although religious minorities are permitted to publicly celebrate their festivals, they frequently encounter subtle social disruptions and barriers in performing religious rituals freely. The study highlighted how systemic intolerance impedes religious expression and emphasized the need for increased societal acceptance and interfaith harmony to foster peaceful coexistence (Jan et al., 2019).

Fuchs and Fuchs (2020) offered a critical review of literature related to religious minorities in Pakistan, particularly focusing on the conceptual ambiguities surrounding the term "religious minority" in South Asian scholarship. They argued that the category is often conflated with caste-based marginality, which complicates the understanding of religious identity in Pakistan. Their analysis positioned these issues within broader historical debates on post-colonial state-building, sectarianism, and national identity formation. The authors underscored how Christian identity in Pakistan is often entangled with low socio-economic status, occupational exclusion, and institutional invisibility, pointing to a deeper structural marginalization (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2020).

Similarly, Malik and Zaman (2022) explored the political marginalization of Christian communities in urban Punjab, analyzing voter behavior, participation, and minority representation in local governance structures. Their study, based on semi-structured interviews and content analysis of electoral records, found that most Christians were unaware of their political rights and minority seats. The research attributed this to both political exclusion and low educational attainment, further exacerbating the Christian community's detachment from civic life and state institutions (Malik & Zaman, 2022).

Additionally, Yousaf (2021) investigated healthcare disparities among religious minorities in Punjab, revealing that Christian communities often experience discriminatory treatment in public hospitals and limited access to preventive health services. The study highlighted how religious identity intersects with socio-economic status to restrict healthcare access, thereby reinforcing social

exclusion and contributing to poor health outcomes within the community (Yousaf, 2021).

These studies collectively demonstrate that discrimination against Christians in Pakistan is not confined to a single domain but is embedded across multiple sectors of life, including education, employment, healthcare, and political representation. The literature emphasizes the need for inclusive policies, equitable access to resources, and a deeper understanding of intersectional disadvantages faced by religious minorities.

5. Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the multidimensional discrimination experienced by members of the Christian minority in Punjab, Pakistan. The primary aim was to capture the lived experiences of participants regarding socio-economic, political, and health-related inequalities. The research focused on providing a detailed, context-rich account of both long-term and everyday instances of discrimination.

The study was conducted in selected urban and peri-urban localities within Punjab, where Christian populations are significantly concentrated. Data were gathered through **in-depth, semi-structured interviews** with 11 Christian women. **Snowball sampling** was employed due to the sensitivity of the topic and the difficulty of accessing a traditionally marginalized and cautious population. Additionally, **participant observation** was used to supplement interview data, providing contextual insights into the participants' living conditions and social environments.

This qualitative approach was chosen to allow for nuanced understanding of the respondents' subjective experiences, which would be difficult to quantify using standardized instruments. Ethical considerations, including informed consent and confidentiality, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process.

6. Data Collection

The primary data collection tool was a semi-structured **interview schedule**, developed in English and translated into participants' native languages (Punjabi and Urdu) to facilitate better comprehension and response accuracy. Great care was taken during translation to ensure that the original meaning and nuance of the questions were preserved.

A **pilot test** was conducted with three participants—one from each research site—to assess the clarity, relevance, and feasibility of the questions. Based on the feedback, minor adjustments were made to improve the flow and sensitivity of the interview schedule.

Data collection was a time-intensive process due to several challenges. Many respondents had limited formal education or were entirely uneducated, which sometimes made communication difficult. Furthermore, participants displayed initial reluctance and hesitancy in sharing personal or family-related information, largely due to fear of social repercussions or mistrust in external institutions. The

researcher employed empathetic listening and built rapport over time to ease these concerns and ensure voluntary, informed participation.

All interviews were conducted in secure and familiar environments for participants, recorded with consent, and later transcribed for analysis. The combination of interviews and observations enabled a deeper exploration of the structural and interpersonal factors that perpetuate discrimination against the Christian community in Punjab.

7. Discussion

In an effort to capture a diverse range of perspectives, respondents were selected from various socio-economic backgrounds. However, it became evident that a significant proportion of the Christian minority in Punjab belongs to economically disadvantaged strata. The majority of participants were employed in low-wage and low-status occupations such as nursing aides, domestic workers, sweepers, and sanitation staff. This occupational clustering reflects both historical marginalization and structural barriers that limit upward mobility.

Many respondents acknowledged that limited access to education was a key factor contributing to their socio-economic status. They believed that higher educational attainment could improve their employment prospects. However, a subset of participants expressed skepticism regarding the role of education, suggesting that discriminatory hiring practices and lack of meritocracy within institutions would continue to obstruct their progress regardless of qualifications.

A recurring concern among participants was their lack of awareness regarding state policies, including employment quotas for minorities. Most were either unaware of these provisions or felt that they were poorly implemented. The general sentiment was one of dissatisfaction with governmental policies related to minority inclusion in both public and private sector employment.

The study also revealed a lack of entrepreneurial interest or initiative among the respondents. Many participants exhibited a sense of resignation toward their socio-economic conditions and were resistant to change, which may reflect deeper structural disempowerment and generational disadvantage. Overall, the findings suggest that a combination of educational deficits, policy unawareness, social stigmatization, and psychological barriers contribute to the continued marginalization of the Christian community in Punjab.

8. Conclusion

The study was conducted in underprivileged urban and peri-urban areas of Punjab, where the Christian community is predominantly situated within the lower socio-economic class. Respondents consistently identified a lack of access to higher education as a primary barrier to economic advancement, which has restricted them to menial and low-paid employment sectors.

Despite socio-economic constraints, many participants reported relatively cordial relationships with members of the religious majority in their localities. However, significant concerns were raised regarding limitations on freedom of religious

expression. While participants generally felt free to move and work within society, they described restrictions when it came to openly practicing or discussing their faith, especially in public or interfaith spaces.

Another major point of dissatisfaction was the perceived neglect of minority religious infrastructure. Respondents expressed a desire for greater government attention to the maintenance and development of their places of worship. Moreover, the majority were unaware of their political representation through reserved seats in the National Assembly. Those who were aware viewed the representation as symbolic and insufficient to bring about meaningful change.

In conclusion, this study highlights the multifaceted nature of discrimination faced by the Christian minority in Punjab. While some interpersonal relationships with the religious majority may appear neutral or positive, deeper structural inequalities persist across education, employment, political representation, and religious freedom. Addressing these challenges requires targeted policy interventions, awareness campaigns, and the active participation of both the state and civil society to ensure social inclusion, equity, and dignity for all religious minorities in Pakistan.

9. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the systemic discrimination and marginalization faced by the Christian community in Punjab, Pakistan:

1. **Targeted Development Initiatives:**The government must implement comprehensive development programs in areas predominantly inhabited by Christian communities. Dedicated funds and grants should be allocated to improve infrastructure, healthcare, housing, and sanitation in these localities to uplift their quality of life.
2. **Inclusive Educational Campaigns:**Nationwide educational programs and awareness campaigns promoting interfaith harmony and religious tolerance should be introduced at school, college, and community levels. Such efforts can foster mutual respect and contribute to a more peaceful, equitable society.
3. **Curriculum Reform:**Educational curricula should be revised to incorporate accurate, respectful, and inclusive content about religious minorities, including the Christian community. This can help counteract stereotypes and promote social cohesion from an early age.
4. **Public Perception and Social Integration:**Strategic efforts must be made to positively influence public perceptions of the Christian minority. Community-based interfaith dialogue programs should be supported to cultivate integrity, respect, and genuine engagement between Muslim and Christian populations.
5. **Strengthening Institutional Support:**The Ministry of Human Rights and the Ministry for Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony must be empowered and held accountable for enforcing minority rights protections. These institutions should be more responsive in addressing grievances, ensuring justice, and fostering a sense of security among religious minorities.

6. **Legal and Political Safeguards:** Policies ensuring fair implementation of minority quotas in employment and political representation should be monitored and enforced. Efforts must be made to raise awareness among minorities regarding their rights, legal protections, and available governmental support systems.
7. **Psychosocial Empowerment:** Community-level workshops and counseling services should be introduced to empower Christian youth and women, enabling them to overcome internalized marginalization and actively participate in social and economic advancement.

10. Limitations of the Study

Despite its valuable insights, this study encountered several limitations that must be acknowledged:

- **Difficulty in Accessing Respondents:** One of the primary challenges was locating and approaching Christian individuals, particularly those working in the medical field, due to the absence of a centralized directory or database. Many potential participants were reluctant to engage, expressing skepticism about the intended use of their information, despite assurances of confidentiality and academic purpose.
- **Fear and Distrust of Government:** A significant number of respondents exhibited strong apprehension when asked questions related to government policies and political representation. This hesitation stemmed from a deep-seated fear of surveillance or repercussions, which likely influenced the openness and depth of their responses.
- **Constraints of Solo Fieldwork:** Conducting both interviews and participant observation simultaneously proved logistically and emotionally demanding for a single researcher. The dual responsibility sometimes limited the depth of engagement with respondents and hindered real-time note-taking or contextual analysis during interactions.

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