

# The Demographical Factors Affecting Religious Tolerance of Youths in Malaysia

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## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to study demographical factors affecting religious tolerance of youths in Malaysia. Religion is considered as one of the most sensitive issues that may trigger conflict among society as it involves human belief and faith. For the society to be equipped with respect towards other religious systems, religious tolerance should be nurtured from the early age. Hence, research on religious tolerance from various demographical backgrounds of youth should be given recognition. This research aims to identify the level of youth religious tolerance in terms of perception, attitude, willingness, experience and behaviour, and the difference in the respondents' demographic background. The methodology used cross-sectional approach with a quantitative research done by survey. The research samples were randomly selected by a stratified random sampling involving 500 youths aged 15 to 24. The questionnaire was using research instruments on socio-religious tolerance developed by Ahmad Tarmizi (2010) to measure religious tolerance. Data collected were analysed by descriptive and statistical inference using SPSS 22.0 software. The findings show that the respondents are religiously tolerant. They have positive perception and attitude, and they are willing to be religiously tolerant. However, their experience and behaviour levels towards religious tolerance are moderate. The demographical factors that show significant difference are gender, ethnicity, religion, types of ethnicities in the neighbourhood and number of acquaintances from other ethnicities. The implication of this research, there is a need for Malaysians to be more open to daily socialisation and inter-racial interaction.

**Keywords:** Level Of Religious Tolerance, Demography, Religion, Youth

## 1. Introduction

Malaysia is known as a multi-racial country. According to the distribution of the population (Department of Statistics 2011), Malay (54.6%), Chinese (24.6%) and Indian (7.3%) are among the main races in Peninsular Malaysia. Generally, a society of multi-ethnicities is synonymous with their respective religions (Mohd Nor 2011). Referring to the distribution of the population (Department of Statistics 2011), the Muslim society in Malaysia makes up 61.3%, Buddha 19.8%, Christian 9.2%, and Hindu 6.3%. However, it cannot be denied that there are

groups of Chinese and Indians who have embraced Islam and Christianity (Department of Statistics 2011). Thus, it is clear that Malaysia is a country with various beliefs and religions. These diversities will result in difference and these differences have to be well managed. Therefore, to avoid racial-religious conflict, the attitude of tolerance with other religions in this country is essential to be instilled in every level of society. It has to start at the early age as early as primary school or at home.

Religious tolerance is one of the topics that is consistently discussed, deliberated and debated to bring harmony to the world (Talib & Gill 2012). Religious tolerance is not a trivial issue and should not be taken lightly, it is the foundation to the country's harmony. Should religious tolerance cease to exist, it will be one of the sources of societal conflict in a multi-religious society. Therefore, this research highlights the level of religious tolerance among Malaysian youths and the demographical factors that shape religious tolerance.

## **2. Problem Statement**

If religious tolerance is measured by misunderstandings, inter-religious disputes and non-violent bickering, Malaysia's religious tolerance has reached a worrying state. Malaysia has carved several historical inter-religious conflicts which have angered the people such as the controversy usage of the word 'Allah' (Amat Misra & Awang 2012; Wan Hassan, Muslim & Alias 2013; Mohd Nor 2011; Manap et al. 2013), the issue of Lina Joy or Azlina Jailani (Tan & Lee 2008; Mohd Khambali @ Hambali & Mohd Haled 2008; Md Yusof 2006; Abu Bakar 2013; Talib & Gill 2012), the insulting of Islam by teenage couple Alvin and Vivian (Karmini 2013), the placing of the head of a swine at a Rawang and Sentul Mosque, the dispute of temple Sri Mariamman at Shah Alam and many others (Ramli & Jamaludin 2011). If given a careful observation on this country's issues concerning religious sensitivity, they are enough to brew endless frustration of many parties. Is this because of the absence of inter-religious understanding or is it intentionally done by a minority to spark a conflict? According to Abd. Rahim et al. (2011), Muslims have to be educated in order to be tolerant with citizens of different religious beliefs. This, however, sparks the question; are Muslims intolerant or are non-Muslims being prejudice towards Muslims? Hence, this research shall specify the level of religious tolerance from the perspective of various demographical backgrounds of gender, ethnicity, religion, types of ethnicities in the neighbourhood and number of acquaintances from other ethnicities.

## **3. Research Objectives**

This research aims to measure domains and level of religious tolerance in terms of perception, attitude, willingness, experience and behaviour, and to identify the differences of demographic backgrounds in determining the level of religious tolerance among youths in Malaysia.

## **4. Research Methodology**

This study used cross-sectional data involving respondents of different communities but at the same period of time (Creswell 2014). The cross-sectional research design is suitable for this research because it is able to measure attitude, belief, opinion or practice at a time. This research implemented a quantitative approach to disseminating survey forms as it is easier to garner cooperation from respondents and will gather more reception (Abdul Ghafar 1999).

### Sampling and Data Collection Procedures

A total number of 500 student youths of Malays, Chinese and Indians aged 15 to 24 were chosen as the research sample, assuming that this age range is the most suitable age to be educated on religious tolerance. Five states of Perak, Selangor, Johor, Negeri Sembilan and Malacca were chosen as samples because of their diversity (Department of Statistics) of residing multiple major ethnics (Malay, Chinese, Indian) in line with the ratio intended by the researcher. The research sampling was employed by the stratified sampling approach. The respondents were chosen as per the ratio of 5:3:2 of Malays, Chinese, and Indians.

### Research Instrument

The research instrument was divided into two parts. Part A was religious tolerance (consists of perception, attitude, willingness, behaviour and experience in religious tolerance). Part B was the demography of the respondents. Every part in Part A contained five items. This questionnaire was developed by Talib (2010). All parts were based on the 5-point Likert scale of which level 1 represented the lowest and level 5 represented the highest. Level 1 represented 'Strongly disagree', followed by level 2 'Disagree', level 3 'Not sure', level 4 'Agree' and level 5 'Strongly agree'. An example of a question in this part was 'You believe that all religions teach good and noble values'.

Reliability is a Cronbach's alpha value of not more than 0.7 (Awang 2014; Hair et al. 2010). The value of reliability in this research is as follows.

Table 1:  
Research instrument reliability

Part	Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) value (N = 500)
Perception towards religious tolerance (5)	0.780
Attitude towards religious tolerance (5 item)	0.809
Willingness towards religious tolerance (5 item)	0.864
Behaviour towards religious tolerance (5 item)	0.859
Experience towards religious tolerance (5 item)	0.845

For items under religious tolerance, the alpha value is higher than 0.6. Hence, no items should be removed. The following are examples of items for each construct. For the perception on religious tolerance was 'All religious followers should be tolerant to others.' Another example for attitude towards religious tolerance was 'Wedding functions for acquaintances of different religion should be attended.' An example for willingness towards religious tolerance was 'You are prepared to attend wedding functions held by acquaintances from different religions.' An example for behaviour towards religious tolerance is 'You always attending wedding functions held by acquaintances from different religions.' An example for experience towards religious tolerance was 'You always get invitations to attend wedding functions held by acquaintances from different religions.'

### Research Data Analysis

The data collected were analysed using the SPSS 22.0 software. The analyses were elaborated descriptively and statistical inference. The T-test and ANOVA analysis were carried out to measure the differences between the two and more than two groups.

## 5. Results and Discussions

The level of religious tolerance of all the respondents were at a high level (56.2%). The same was concluded in previous research completed by Khareng and Awang (2014), Talib (2013) And Mu'alim et al. (2015) which shows Muslim and Buddhist students have high religious tolerance. The community at Ambon consists of Christians and Muslims also have high religious tolerance. The Malaysian community of 600 respondents of various backgrounds from Selangor, Pulau Pinang, Kelantan, Terengganu and Kedah also have high levels of religious tolerance. However, the research completed by Talib (2010) which consists of 600 respondents from Selangor and Kuala Lumpur show moderate levels of religious tolerance. This means that the community of Christians, Buddhists and Muslims have high levels of religious tolerance. Each and every one of them practice peace and harmony by allowing and respecting other religions in their vicinity.

Table 2:

Religious tolerance level

<b>Constructs of Religious Tolerance</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Level</b>
Perception	4.060	0.772	High
Attitude	3.920	0.751	High
Willingness	3.994	0.793	High
Experience	3.398	0.945	Moderate
Behaviour	3.399	1.004	Moderate
<b>Religious Tolerance</b>	<b>3.754</b>	<b>0.689</b>	<b>High</b>

The T-test was conducted on the gender group. The ANOVA test was performed to all background groups other than the gender group. The result of difference in religious tolerance across background groups are shown in table 3 below. The level of religious tolerance among youths in Malaysia in this sampling found out that there was no significant differences between the genders. This means that, the gender factor had no impact on the level of religious tolerance to the respondents. An individual, regardless of a male or a female, showed no difference in religious tolerance. On the other hand, factors such as ethnicity, religion, types of ethnicities in the neighbourhood and number of friends from other ethnicities showed significant difference.

Table 3:

The differences in religious tolerance across demographic background group

<b>Group</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t / F</b>	<b>P-value</b>
<b>Gender</b>				
Male (N=250)	3.728	0.700	0.654	0.513
Female (N=250)	3.685	0.760		
<b>Ethnic</b>				
Malay	3.509	0.682	26.213	0.000
Chinese	3.781	0.641		
Indian	4.091	0.802		
<b>Religion</b>				
Muslim	3.515	0.677	8.654	0.000

Buddhist	3.780	0.648		
Hinduism	4.041	0.819		
Christian	3.988	0.691		
<b>Types of ethnicities in the neighbourhood</b>				
Dominated by other races	3.900	0.754	3.266	0.039
Mix with other races	3.734	0.729		
Same ethnicities	3.557	0.712		
<b>Numbers of friend other ethnic</b>				
Many	3.904	0.731	17.188	0.000
A few	3.527	0.669		
None	3.557	0.770		

Religious tolerance in Indian ethnicities was higher than that of the Chinese ethnicities and the Malay ethnicities. The religious tolerance of these three ethnicities were significantly different. The same is said for religion, it was aptly identical to ethnicities. The religious tolerance in Hindus was the highest followed by Christians, Buddhists and Muslims. However, the level of tolerance for Buddhists-to-Christians and Hindus-to-Christians showed no significant difference. Respondents residing in areas dominated by other ethnicities had higher levels of religious tolerance as opposed to respondents residing in areas with multiple ethnicities and comparable ethnicities. Respondents knowing many friends from other ethnicities had higher levels of religious tolerance compared to respondents having less friends from other ethnicities and no friends at all. There was no notable difference between the respondents having less number of friends and no friend at all from other ethnicities.

In line with the research results by Talib (2010), ethnicities and religious background have a significant difference in religious tolerance. The exact is consistent with the mixture of other races in the neighbourhood and friends from other races, there is a direct correlation towards the respondents' religious tolerance. This shows that the identity of an ethnicity and religion of a respondent, influence the level of religious tolerance. For example, the results signify that religious tolerance of Indian ethnicities or Hindus are higher than of Chinese ethnicities or Buddhists and Malay ethnicities or Muslims. Malay ethnicities or Muslims have the lowest level of religious tolerance compared to other ethnicities or religions, agreeing with research by Talib (2010; 2013) which indicates the Malay ethnicities and Muslims are the lowest of religious tolerance than other races. If further investigated, the factors causing Malay ethnicities and Muslims to have the lowest religious tolerance towards other ethnicities and religions are because of the strict laws and taboos in the Muslim community. For example, other religions are free from taboos except for Hindus; prohibited to eat meat. Muslims are not allowed from drinking intoxicants, consume swine, consume amphibians, consume animals slaughtered without the mention of the word Allah and many others. This, however, have made socialising with other religions preceded with limits. Muslims seldom come to wedding ceremonies or open houses due to the factor of *halal* and *haram* as opposed to non-Muslims, having no taboos enabling them to come to ceremonies hosted by Muslims.

This is one of the factors responsible for the lowest level of religious tolerance compared to other religions. However, the rules and regulations contain wisdom behind them for the betterment of the physical and mental. For example intoxicants can make one forget themselves for a second and potentially making the intoxicated perform anything detrimental

for himself and others around him. Other than that, through another measure of 'belief that all religions are the same', Muslims score the lowest. This is because, all religions are the same is in direct contradiction to the Muslim belief system (*aqidah*). As stated by Allah in Surah al-Kafirun verse 6 "For you is your religion, and for me is my religion." Hence, due to this, the perception of religious tolerance among Muslims becomes low.

The results explained that with more socialising, communicating or interacting with other races, the higher the respondent's level of religious tolerance. Weak communication and interaction brew social conflict as described in research by Mu'alim et al. (2015). High tolerance enables religious persons to better interact with other religions without prejudice.

According to the theory of religious tolerance by Al-Qaradhawi (2015), as signified in the research results, the respondents with the highest level of religious tolerance are respondents who do not prohibit other religions to do whatever they believe as stated in their school of thought or religious teachings even though it is prohibited in the respondents' religion. This is in agreement in what Allah SWT has said through Surah al-Mumtahanah verse 8 to 9 which stresses that it is enjoined to do good and to be just with those who do not wage war on our religion, who do not chase us out from our neighbourhood and help others to expel us. Surah al-Kafirun verse 6 stresses that every person is free to profess their religious teachings and at the same time do not disrupt the adherence, belief, and way of life of others.

With a high level of religious tolerance – tolerating with each other on trivial issues to sensitive matters involving differences in religion – each and every one of the societal constituents can undoubtedly spur civilizational development in the Malaysian society to be more advanced and progressive.

## **6. Conclusion**

The respondents' level of religious tolerance as a whole is at a high level. The types of religious tolerance comprise of five constructs and the construct of perception, attitude and willingness to religious tolerance are also at a high level. Whereas the construct of experience and behaviour towards religious tolerance are at a moderate level. The level of religious tolerance in this research show no significant difference in the gender category. The significant differences are found in ethnic groups, religion, types of race in the neighbourhood and numbers of friends from other races. Indian ethnicities and Hindus have the highest level of tolerance compared to other ethnicities and religions. Respondents residing in areas dominated by other races and have many friends from various races show high level of religious tolerance as opposed to other categories.

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