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Pursuing Inclusive Vocational Education Amidst Discrimination: The Plight and Hopes of Christian Youth in Pakistan

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Abstract: *In every part of the world, communities are considered minorities based on their ethnicity, nationality, religion, or race. However, in the modern world, the concept of equality has been on the rise, and the right to technical education and being part of the skilled economy is one of the major rights to foster inclusiveness and help marginalized groups, particularly religious minorities who face dissent and hatred. This study aims to find out the challenges faced by Christian minorities in Pakistan in attaining education in the TVET sector, gathering data from 14 young Christian TVET trainees. It highlights key areas, obstacles, and challenges faced by this marginalized community, reflecting on their past educational experiences and future aspirations. Recommendations are made for TVET authorities and policymakers to attain an inclusive education system and practices.*

Key Words: Marginalised Groups, Religious Minorities, Christians, TVET, Inclusive, High-tech Vocational Skills

Introduction

Religious minorities cover 4 percent of Pakistan's population, and despite that, they recognize our nation as the second largest Muslim nation-state in the world news. Yet, most of them experience stress due to everyday violence, rejection, and discrimination. These problematic matters range from a deficiency of education, sanitation, transportation, and health care to professional judgment, as well as continuous practices of forcefulness such as kidnapping and forced conversions, complaints of violations, homicide attacks, and numerous assaults on places of worship. Thus, no normal life could be imagined by religious minorities in Pakistan, according to this representation.

Related alarms are reflected by the educational conclusions on religious minorities in Pakistan in general (Khokhar & Muhammad, 2020, 2022). Pieter Streefland's ethnographic study on this subject, *The Sweepers of Slaughterhouse: Conflict and Survival in a Karachi Neighbourhood*, is significant in this academic debate (Streefland, 1979). These educated deliberations recognized that Christians faced dual judgments on spiritual and social backgrounds. However, they delivered comprehensive explanations about the life of Christians in Pakistan, such as empathy relations, interchange financial prudence, and work engagements.

From 1980 to 1986, during the period of authority of Zia-ul-Haq, violations of laws were proposed, so minorities are discussed in educational arguments on two essential themes: governmental effects of these laws and harassment of the country's Christian community. The Christian community is ranked as sideline marginalized and highlighted as a mistreated minority (Yousaf, 2016). Linda Walbridge's 2003 publication represents the revolutionary study on this aspect, *The Christians of Pakistan: The Passion of Bishop John Joseph*. Like Streefland's study, she emphasized mainly Punjabi Christians and their life in the world (Walbridge, 2003). Walbridge debates mainly on blasphemy laws due to political and legal outcomes

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instead of focusing on judgmental and harassment of caste marked as disgraceful. Her autobiography of Pakistan's first ethnic Punjabi Catholic bishop, John Joseph, shows that she discovered these topics for the caption of her book. Joseph committed suicide in protest against the violation of laws on 6 May 1988 in front of a session court in Sahiwal, a city located nearly fifty miles south of Lahore. Joseph was the leader of the Diocese of Faisalabad in 1984. For more than thirty years, the Catholic Church has been designated as the symbol of the largest cultural group of Pakistani Christians, solidifying its position through institutionalized discrimination and entrenched power structures within the foundations of the Church in Pakistan.

Walbridge (2003) and Walbridge (2003) respected contributions must be considered for the current research topic. She added to her research the fortune of ethnographic interpretation of the Shia community and a new basis discussion about Christianity in Pakistan (Walbridge & Sievert, 2003). On the other hand, she portrays the incredible resemblance between Shia' and Christian worship practices. Walbridge witnessed that, like Ashura's grief marches, Christians also protested on the streets and beat themselves with heavy chains after the suicide of Bishop Joseph. After conducting 13 detailed surveys, she discovered that high-caste individuals from Protestant and Catholic communities in Punjab, who had originally come from Shia backgrounds like their renowned leader, possessed the ability to engage in productive discussions about religiousness, historical recovery, and the divinity of Christian and Shia' communities (Fletcher, 2005).

A great number of Christians related to rural areas in the Sheikhpura district arranged an annual fair for the Mela-like Catholic shrine, which attracted the attention of a vast number of visitors from various religions. This fair facilitates an amazing break to learn about history, tradition, and the holy link between native Hindu, Sufi, and Christian rehearses. Additional research mainly focused on the blasphemy laws, picturizing the Christian community as worthless on earth, struggling to survive, and facing degradation repeatedly. Now, current authors highlight the contribution of Christian members in political debates and their participation in social and media work instead of exposing the Christian community as inactive inheritors of violence (Ahmad et al., 2023).

Some researchers are also dedicated to various phases of Christian lived practices, such as the connection of caste, stories of historical roots, and challenges to beginning a dialogue with different groups of believers, but they are still excluded compared with the Christian community. Fewer research is present on other minorities like Shia, Hindus, Ahmadis, and Sikhs. This error is obvious concerning Hindus, who have the same number of people as Christians and have stronger origins in the past of the subcontinent (Jan et al., 2019). Ali Usman Qasmi was systematically punished for an outstanding involvement concerning Ahmadiyya, historically complicated education, Ahmadis, and the Politics of Spiritual Prohibition in Pakistan (Hunter, 2024).

Saadia Saeed also highlighted the absence of a solid theory of equality in citizenship rights of several religious societies that is related to the Ahmadi in the governmental area (Saeed, 2010). Andreas Rieck published his first book about the Shia of Pakistan, which is related to this theme. Rieck elucidates in his book the Shia's inner pressure to get privilege about their rights and safety from the Pakistan State (Rieck, 2015). Instead of all of these helps and influences, marginalization and discrimination are still universal on minorities in Pakistan.

This study aims to analyze the challenges of Christian minorities in Pakistan and their struggle to obtain their equivalent rights in politics, education, and social life through legal and governmental means.

Research Methodology

This research is determined to recognize the capabilities and challenges faced by TVET in Pakistan for marginalized societies. The issues confronted by the Christian minorities are the main objective of this study in the TVET sector of Pakistan. The data was collected online. Data were collected from 14 participants studying in three specific disciplines by the STEP Institute of Art, Design, and Management for this task. Those disciplines are Digital Marketing, Beautician, and Graphic Design. These are three cohorts with 25 students in each of them. The survey and an online advocacy session were announced to 75 students to sign up online. An online session on issues relating to challenges of identity and insecurities



faced by Christian Vocational Students was conducted. The purpose of this online meeting was to explain the core topics and issues, define their meaning and potential impact, and enable the young learner to explore their observations and experiences.

People's views and mentalities are comprehended by the organized qualitative strategy, which is one of the best methods to get a detailed analysis of emotions, behaviors, ideas, outlooks, and opinions (Miles et al., 2020). The purposive sampling method was used for data collection. In this method, scholars select the participants to collect the data for the aim and requirements of the study. It was ensured that the recruited participants related to the specific marginalized community—in our case, Christian students in the Institute (Creswell & Poth, 2024).

Information was collected by constructing an “online qualitative survey” (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Out of the total of 75 learners, 32 students signed up online to participate in the session. These are young students related to the age group of 17 and 18. The research agenda arranged the questions series to enquire from the participants. First, participants should know all the concepts of psychological insecurities and identity crises. Furthermore, they were asked and requested to do a qualitative survey online. In the second stage, after the advocacy session, 14 vocational learners approved and accepted to respond to this online qualitative survey. Two interrogated questions were enquired from 5 central themes. There were issues related to recognition, security, psychological anxiety, depression, and justice. The participants shared their opinions openly. All the information was collected on Google surveys.

Qualitative data was analyzed by using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022)—with the aid of NVivo 14 (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). In addition, ethical consideration played an important role throughout the entire research process. The participants were required to supply informed consent in which they acknowledged that they knew the purpose of the study and their rights and that they participated willingly. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained in order to protect the participants from any future harm (Ryen, 2021).

Conceptual Framework

The following conceptual framework was used for the current research. The framework was used by Priyanka (2021) and Priyanka (2021) in her discussion on challenges faced by minorities in India. The five key inquiry areas of this conceptual framework—the problem of identity, the problem of security, the problem relating to equity, the problem of being deprived, and the problem of psychological insecurity—were taken into consideration for the current study.

Priyanka's (2021) conceptual framework on the challenges faced by minorities in India was found to be suitable and appropriate for this study in Pakistan as well. India and Pakistan are neighboring countries, and there are many socio-cultural similarities in both countries, which include the history of religious tensions and the marginalization of minority groups. Using this framework allowed a structured examination of the unique experiences and of the Christian community's struggles in Pakistan's context while drawing from research on analogous challenges faced by minorities in the region.

Analysis

The findings of the study are organized according to the following themes:

Problem of Identity: Negotiating Religious Identity in a Predominantly Muslim Society

Most participants' responses showed that strong judgments and unfriendly behaviors exist and are faced by the Christian minority in Pakistan. Schools are not an exception. They faced bullying about their religious identity and physical appearance not only by their schoolfellows but sometimes by the teachers as well. They elucidated the occasions where they were left out and experienced discrimination by their teachers and school administration on account of their faith and religious association. Such inequitable actions and behaviors produce rage and anger among the minority and marginalized sections. ‘Name-calling is a usual way to humiliate Christians,’ one participant shared. He stated:

"I have faced a lot of problems. Once, my teacher said that you do not look like a Christian. His point of view was that most Christian people are dark and they look black. Some of my classfellows used to call me 'CHLOORHA,' which was very insulting!" (Participant 3)

Another participant shared his thoughts on the problem of identity he faced:

"The colleagues at my father's office didn't even wish at our festivals like Christmas or Easter, but we always make it a point to wish our Muslim family friends on their Eid days and other religious festivals." (Participant 4)

Furthermore, participants expressed their frustration with the absence of a cordial and inclusive environment, which they had experienced in their previous schools. Most of them face loneliness and are not able to make expressive links with their schoolfellows and colleagues, especially if they are studying in a non-Christian or Muslim school. One participant shared:

"I have faced many issues as a Christian Pakistani. Some teachers have very rude behavior. They didn't talk politely with us and did not guide us properly." (Participant 1)

Another participant stated:

"My academic life has never been smooth. People who do not have the same faith do not fully understand us. Most of them did not make friends with us in schools and colleges. They even won't drink water in the same glass that we have used." (Participant 2)

Contrary to the above, a few participants seemed nearly content with their experiences. They showed confidence in what they were doing, and they seemed optimistic about positive career development because of their current vocational training. They also believed that TVET was an excellent opportunity and a chance for them to grow economically and attain a respectful social status. For example, one participant pointed out the promising prospects of her entrepreneurial career after she was done with her current Digital Graphic Design training.

She replied:

"Being a member of a religious minority group that does not have a lot of equitable options in this country, I strongly think the high-tech vocational courses are a blessing for us. I am hoping it will resolve a lot of issues for me and problems of identity because the industry requires my strong portfolio and skills and not my faith." (Participant 13)

Being optimistic about her career and future professional pursuits, she added:

"I visualize an office of my own where I will start my design consultancy, and I will also work as a freelance designer online to sustain my financial situation. While hiring staff for my future design agency, I will never look at the faith of a person, but I will check the skills and competencies of the person." (Participant 12)

Answering the problem of identity, another participant responded:

"I studied in a Muslim school previously, and now I am doing vocational training at this Institute. I am extremely happy with the management here. Everyone was there at the X Mass function in December. I have never had this experience before. I wish the whole country had the same environment. I never had any identity problem here." (Participant 10)

The positive feelings were endorsed by one other participant. He stated:

"I am doing a Digital Marketing course, and the best part of my future profession is that I can work online and earn good money. My full-length bachelor's degree will hardly give me the option of earning this much. I have gained confidence, and the fear of identity is fading away. I will strongly recommend my younger cousins to follow the same path." (Participant 7)

Although the response was mixed, the positive side is that most participants were happy and content with their current training content as well as the training institute. They felt they were given respect and equal rights to learning. They were optimistic about their future professional pursuits. They believed that a promising future and professional success would greatly help eradicate the limitations they had been experiencing in the past regarding the problem of identity in Pakistan.

Notably, almost all participants believed TVET and high-tech vocational training courses were the best choices they had made, and they felt secure about their financial situation, their professional careers, and having a secure future. Their social statuses will earn them respect and recognition in society, and the problems of identity will have the least impact on them. They emphasized more TVET opportunities for



minorities and more advocacy to inform Christian youth and other minorities to opt for TVET as a secure channel for career progression, financial stability, and chances of better employment.

Participants' reactions also underline the complicated relationship among young Christian students' personal experiences with regular and non-Christian schools, their teachers, and class fellows, as well as the administration of their schools. It is notable for identifying how their experiences shaped their beliefs and views on the problem of identity that minority groups are facing in Pakistan.

Problem Of Security: Living With Fear: The Constant Threat Of Violence And Discrimination

The responses of participants on the issue of security in Pakistan reflect the general sense of threats and insecurities faced by marginalized sections of society like the Christian youth in the provincial capital city of Lahore, which claims to be a metropolitan city and the second largest city in the country. Most participants reported experiences of a sense of insecurity, both physical and mental, that they felt because of their religion and faith. Examples of verbal abuse, negative judgments, and even physical violence were reported, underlining the critical issues of bullying, hate, and discrimination being faced by minorities in Pakistan.

One participant responded:

"I remember taking tuition for my Matriculation exam preparation, and just next to the academy was an Islamic Madrassa that promoted Jihad, and one of my Muslim friends would tell me it is fine to kill non-Muslims in Jihad. I am not sure if it is true and if he just joked, but the feeling of insecurity has always haunted me since then." (Participant 1)

In educational and institute settings, some participants recalled their sense of insecurity to explain their experiences of animosity and unwelcoming attitudes exhibited by some teachers. This involved offensive comments, name-calling based on one's faith, severe punishments compared to Muslim students for minor mistakes, and exclusion from some school extracurricular activities.

These practices not only fracture the feeling of security at the tender teenage stage but, in some cases, tormented the self-confidence and personal prestige of some non-Muslim students, more often resulting in low academic scores and grades, which make lives more difficult for ambitious students.

Referring to negative judgments by powerful people, one participant shared:

"I applied to work in a call center to support my studies as my parents cannot afford expensive private education, and I had a terrible experience during my job interview. The owner of that call center misbehaved with me. His attitude changed as soon as he learned about my religion. It was very insulting." (Participant 8)

Besides education, additionally, two participants also pointed out the horrible events where their family members received death threats; one mentioned a mysterious letter stating the Christian family should leave the vicinity, or else they would be inflicted harm. The family eventually left the area and moved to a Christian population clustered area to live.

Responding to the general state of security in the country, one participant stated:

"I have never been hit or physically tortured, thanks to God, but we do not have peace of mind here. A year ago, there was a political procession of a religious political party, and my uncle's bike was burnt since he is a Christian. We were so scared. My parents didn't allow me to leave home, even for school. This is more of a mental torture that we mostly face!" (Participant 6)

Another commented:

"I haven't faced any physical insecurity or violence in my life, but I have experienced bullying and disgraceful behavior several times in and out of school. I have learned to stay low profile, and I try not to mention my religion unless it is a necessity." (Participant 11)

Unfortunately, religious minorities in Pakistan sometimes experience extreme safety risks and dreadful events of terrorism, including bomb blasts, riots, and uncontrolled aggressive mobs. What is even more tragic is that the frequency of these incidences is on the high side. Experiencing one such event, one participant responded:

“About four years ago, our whole family was in the Church to pray on a Sunday, and then suddenly, we heard the horrible sounds of a bomb blast just close to our Church in the Yahunabad area. We were safe, but my father lost his best friend in that tragic event. I was very young and was so traumatized, I couldn’t sleep at night for over a week.” (Participant 10)

Despite a lot of negative experiences and tragic encounters, a few participants also mentioned that, generally, they live and move in safe environments, whether for education or social reasons. All participants were content with the issue of safety in their current vocational institute, and it was encouraging that they never felt insecure in the institute. They considered the overall institute environment friendly, and the behavior of staff and administration was considered polite.

Reflecting the same notion, one participant stated:

“Being a Christian and a girl, my parents have to think twice before allowing me to join a non-Christian school or institute. It was a relief to them when I told them that one of my teachers is also a Christian. I think more Christian staff and teachers should work in vocational education institutes.” (Participant 13)

However, worries continue related to the post-training situations where these young TVET graduates would eventually start working. The female participants, in general, felt this more. They believed the workplaces must be inclusive and friendlier for religious minorities to enable more Christian girls to work and earn decent careers. They called for a safer law and order environment and stronger law enforcement agencies to ensure everyone is safe, regardless of their religion or economic background.

One participant appreciated the inclusive policies and environment of their current TVET institute:

“The orientation presentation which was given to us in the first week of our course was very encouraging. We were told that the institute runs an inclusive and equal opportunity policy and that they welcome everyone. Photos of last year’s X Mass event in the college furthered my confidence. I was happy to know the success stories included Christian graduates who are having a successful career after their vocational training.” (Participant 5)

Another participant wrote:

“I guess our security issue could not be permanently solved. The environment of my training institute is very safe and friendly, but I also have to train my mind to cope with unfriendly situations after this training at my workplace. Not everyone is kind and nice, but I wish I could get a job in the same institute after my training.” (Participant 10)

Problem Relating To Equity: Fighting for A Seat at the Table—The Struggle for Equal Rights and Representation

Pakistan is generally thought to be part of the league where a lot more needs to be done when it comes to equity and social justice for all. Various international and neutral research sources claim the same. Most participants expressed a similar feeling during this research. They shared their experiences of past learning environments and thoughts on their future, specifically their work pursuits.

One participant recalled her primary school memory:

“As a kid, performing in front of the whole school during our daily morning assemblies always fascinated me. I so wanted to sing a poem or perform in front of my teachers and schoolfellows. Despite several attempts and requests, I was never given the chance to do so. I wouldn’t have minded if it was due to my inability or lack of confidence. My elder sister, who studied in the same school, told me one day that ‘they would never allow you because we are not like them. We are not Muslims’. It was a heart-breaking lesson for a grade four young girl.” (Participant 9)

Another annoyed participant shared:

“There was a teacher in my school in class 6, who would always have an issue with me and my other Christian cousin. We were the only two Christian kids in the class. He dropped me as Class Prefect, although I deserved it. I strongly feel he was biased and didn’t like me because of my faith.” (Participant 8)

A few participants seemed skeptical about the issue of equity in their future workplaces and employers. Being beneficiaries, they appreciated the minority-specific training scheme, but they still worried about what would happen next and if they would be employed right after their training was finished. Interestingly, this negative feeling existed more in the comments of TVET students who were part of conventional skills areas, like beauticians or the Hair & Makeup sector. However, those in high-tech



vocational areas like Digital Marketing or Graphic Design seemed more confident since they believed in having equal online professional and earning options.

One Hair & Makeup trainee stated:

“You can always see more Christian girls being hired for odd tasks like manicures or pedicures, and it takes us double the effort to prove we can also work as hair stylists or makeup artists. Especially if you have a dark complexion, people don’t consider you pretty enough to work in the beauty sector at more glamorous roles.” (Participant 4)

Other than individual thoughts of uncertainty about finding decent jobs after training, there existed a general demotivated attitude about the overall economic situation in Pakistan. Most participants believed that very few jobs were available, and those that did exist were highly competitive. They also mentioned the issue of nepotism and personal links that play a major role in getting employed, especially in the public sector. One participant thought the job quota reserved for minorities was way too lesser than it should have been. He also thought it was a deliberate design of the whole system, which restricted the marginalized communities from having respectful career options.

One participant shared a sad experience of not being treated well in his secondary school dispensary, which he thought was because of his religion, and another shared how he was always made to sit at the back in the Islamiyat period. They were not allowed to leave the class since it was only for Muslims, but they would be asked to sit back silently on the back benches. He did not like it. A few other responses also highlighted the non-inclusive situations of injustices and inequalities that minorities regularly experience in Pakistan.

On the other hand, few respondents expressed their gratitude for equal treatment in their previous schools or work environments. One participant stated:

“I studied at a Christian missionary school where we also had Muslim students. After Matriculation, I joined a private Muslim college for my Intermediate, and I had a few fears, but I have never had any trouble there. I love my college and all my teachers.” (Participant 3)

Problem of Being Deprived: Dreams Deferred—The Impact of Limited Access to Resources and Opportunities

The general perceptions from most responses suggested unfavorable conditions for the vast majority of Pakistan. One participant shared that ‘if you are financially well off, nobody cares about your religion in Pakistan, but if you are poor and happen to be a Christian, then you are in deep trouble.’ A lot of responses were too generic, and participants believed either they or their parents had somehow experienced being deprived at some stage in their lives because of their religion.

One participant shared:

“I did my Matriculation with Islamiyat as one of the subjects instead of Ethics (which is the prescribed subject for non-Muslims). I was never given the option to take Ethics because there was no teacher in my school. I failed in Islamiyat in 9th class, and it lowered my overall marks too, depriving me of a good college to continue my Intermediate education in Sciences. I had to join I. Com eventually, which I didn’t like.” (Participant 1)

A few participants also mentioned there were fewer holidays given on their religious occasions, like Easter. On the contrary, Muslims are given more time and holidays for their religious festivities. They also mentioned that the number of in-house religious-based school activities is not balanced. One participant shared how she was not given equal opportunities to take part in school extra-curricular activities. She shared:

“In my first year at college, I used to win the debates and speeches competitions since I was studying English Literature, and I had always performed well at my last school. In the 2nd year, the teacher was biased, and she never allowed me to present my college externally.” (Participant 14)

Another participant mentioned his elder brother’s experience of not being able to join a law enforcement government department because of his religion, although he believed his brother had qualified for the written and physical test for the job. Experiences of being ignored, rejected, or offered lower salaries because of participants’ religion were also depicted in various other responses.

In comparison to the skeptical perspectives, a lot of responses showed participants' confidence that their current vocational high-tech training and skills would enable them to get more employment opportunities. They thought they could compete efficiently for jobs with their added vocational skills and certification. One participant stated:

"I always wanted to go to Europe to join my uncle there, and he would always suggest that I get some technical skills. I am now very happy because my current vocational diploma will enable me to go abroad and work there. I could earn more and financially support my parents." (Participant 6)

It is motivating to see that a vast majority of participants have high expectations of their careers after their vocational qualifications and a lot of them plan to start working online to earn a start ear. The high-tech qualification trainees were especially very positive about their bright chances to attain financial strength.

One participant shared:

"The technology change has a positive impact on us. The whole world could be my potential employer. I do not have to rely only on Pakistani employers to hire me. I have already started working through portal registration, and the best thing is that they pay in dollars. Local hiring doesn't matter to me anymore!" (Participant 8)

One participant very logically shared:

"The issue of deprivation cannot be resolved overnight, and my vocational education cannot instantly sort it or in the near future, but this training will open avenues for me later in my life, and in the long run, I am hoping to decrease the deprivation for me and my family once I start earning because of these vocational skills" (Participant 2)

Only one participant believed nothing would change, and Christian minorities would continue to suffer and be deprived no matter how skilled, competent, or educated they were. At the same time, a majority had a promising and positive expectation that their vocational learning would make them more employable, resulting in declined deprivations for them. Almost everyone urged the need to exercise equal opportunities fully and fairly in Pakistan and that the government and policymakers should take serious notice of it.

Problem of Psychological Insecurity: The Emotional Burden of Being a Religious Minority

There were diverse responses from participants of the study, with one extreme seeming confident and content with their future goals and career aspirations, specifically with the TVET expertise in their chosen fields, while the other extreme of views remains entangled to their unfair past experiences, leaving them in a state of pessimism. An encouraging aspect is that those with negative experiences still showed hope to resolve their psychological insecurity after they graduate and can economically strengthen their positions in society.

Most participants were happy with the way they are being dealt with in their current vocational institute. They shared that open and fair treatment was being given to them and that there was no discrimination. They also appreciated the counseling facility in the institute that kept them engaged and the various extracurricular activities and events being equally open and entertaining to all students regardless of their faith or religious identities.

One participant shared:

"I feel relaxed and under no pressure for two reasons: one, my teachers are very friendly and caring, and two, I have always been good at practical things. I am not a theory student and cannot memorize things. This has given me excellent peace of mind." (Participant 14)

However, a few participants responded the other way around. One participant shared,

"Being a minority in a country that was made in the name of religion is something we can never psychologically cope with. In an ideal situation, the entire population of this country needs human rights education, which does not seem possible in my lifetime, so I guess we have to bear with a lot in our lives." (Participant 13)



The participants highlighted the psychological impact of larger-scale violence on a community. They were worried about the long-term ability of the affected families to feel safe and secure. Reflecting on the general societal environment of the country, one participant stated:

The Jaranwala incident shocked me. I felt very low and psychologically insecure. It was shocking to see how so many homes of Christian families were burnt down, and hundreds of people suffered and lost everything they had only in a few hours. It badly affected my mental health. Do you ever think those families will ever feel psychologically secure? The stories and images of that tragedy will always remain in my mind.” (Participant 12)

The participant uses strong verbs ("shocked," "burnt down," "lost everything") to create a sense of horror and devastation. Mentioning "a few hours" emphasizes the suddenness and intensity of the event—thus highlighting the psychological impact of larger-scale violence on a community.

The participants also exposed the underlying sense of "otherness" and potential discrimination faced by the Christian community, even in seemingly positive interactions.

One participant shared:

“I started giving home tuition to support myself for higher studies, and one day, and I realized there was a specific cup meant for me to drink tea, which no one else in that Muslim family uses because I am a Christian. It was very demoralizing, and I was depressed. Although otherwise, it was a civilized family that treated me respectfully. Such incidences are responsible for psychological insecurity.” (Participant 1)

This quote paints a vivid picture of a seemingly small act (separate cup) having a significant emotional impact. The use of "depressed" highlights the severity of the feeling.

However, in terms of possible positive influences and good practices, the participants generally applauded the way their psychomotor skills were being sharpened, and it was satisfying to a majority that their time of education would not be wasted and their vocational education would provide them with opportunities to earn more and quicker compared to the conventional long route and highly competitive traditional university education in Pakistan. One female participant mentioned, ‘More than myself, the choice of my current vocational institute is responsible for psychological security to my parents, who would otherwise not allow me to study if the environment was not conducive and friendly toward Christians.’

It is also worth noting that these young trainees were eager to improve their soft skills, and they believed it to be a byproduct of their learning and working together in groups. The key skills development enlarges the potential role of TVET in developing trainees’ personalities and enhancing their employability skills. One participant commented:

“Other than the technical competencies, what I have enjoyed most is the way our soft skills are enhanced. We are given opportunities to improve our communication skills, team building, and problem-solving skills. The confidence I am getting is greatly helping me in improving my emotional intelligence and psychological well-being.” (Participant 4)

The issue of psychological insecurity in a developing country like Pakistan is not an easy question to answer. No matter how slow, moving in the right direction is essential. The policymakers and TVET administration need to focus a lot more on providing psychological security to the youth of the country, who are otherwise facing this as the biggest issue in the current times of intolerance, aggression, and violence.

Future Recommendations

These are the five potential areas future researchers can explore on the current topic:

An in-depth analysis of current policies regarding TVET to find the gaps and obstacles to include marginalized communities is required. Also, it is inevitable that policy recommendations that promote inclusivity and equity at a large scale in the TVET setup will be proposed.

It will be a milestone if a study is undertaken to find the perspectives of the stakeholders diversely engaged in TVET settings. It may include government agencies, conventional educational institutions, several NGOs working on vocational education purposes, and individuals of marginalized communities. It is suggested that their perceptions, experiences, and challenges for inclusive TVET must be understood.

It is also critical to point out the challenges faced by marginalized religious minority women and girls in the TVET programs in Pakistan. New researchers should examine gender-responsive approaches so that they are also considered important and that their participation and empowerment are fully studied in the TVET context of the country.

It is recommended that the role of community engagement and participation in promoting inclusion, equity, and social justice, particularly in TVET, is also examined. The association between TVET institutions, local communities, and other stakeholders is also crucial to identifying, co-designing, and implementing relevant programs, policies, and respective guidelines.

It is recommended that the potential of advanced technology, e.g., induction of online learning platforms and including high-tech digital vocational skills and training to partially replace the conventional vocational programs, specifically for marginalized communities in Pakistan, be examined. Also, finding out creative approaches to technology for inclusive education and training in TVET provisions.

Discussion

Most religions throughout history promote peace, harmony, and love and teach equality among their followers and non-followers as if in brotherhood, irrespective of ethnicity and the nation of an individual. The religious schools of diverse thought are well-versed in the current issues of mankind, and they are prepared to meet the challenges of the modern world, such as war-like situations, care for needy people, and promote peaceful co-existence worldwide.

A historical perspective reveals that minorities were often deprived of their fundamental rights, and, in some cases, the Constitution itself did not guarantee them equal standing. Every country in the world has minorities residing there who willfully or for several reasons demand equality of rights in society. These minorities, though, deserve complete protection of their fundamental rights to improve their living standards with dignity. This not only can bring a fair name to Pakistan worldwide, but it will also provide them with equal chances to play their role in society.

Considering the current situation in the country, it is obvious that the Christian minority faces serious challenges in different ways of life due to the dissent by a limited number of extremists, while on the other hand, overall, the Muslim community cares about the minorities and has cooperative relations towards them despite their different religion. Society, with the help of the government, ought to act dutifully and fulfill its responsibilities for the provision of equal rights to all religious minorities without the discrimination of race and religion. For Pakistan to be a progressive state, it is crucial to have a good name globally among different communities and nations (Rashid et al., 2023).

TVET has a strong prospective role to play in creating a fair and equitable society in Pakistan. It can be critically considered a strategic weapon to combat poverty, unemployment, and miseries of the unprivileged and marginalized sections of Pakistani society. With the meager economic situation, policymakers in Pakistan need to create more high-tech vocational training opportunities where young people can grow and sustain their careers and jobs, whether online or in-person, locally or globally.

Conclusion

Religious minorities in Pakistan are unable to access the same rights and opportunities, with education being a prime example that the country has to offer. According to Christian TVET students, they have all faced huge problems in life, such as identity crises, security threats, inequality, deprivation, and psychosocial insecurities, which are shared through the stories of the TVET Christians attending this conference. However, it ends on a very positive note, stating that equipping Christians with modern, high-tech vocational skills is extremely important because this would help the Christian students improve their level of employability, financial empowerment, and social status in society, which can finally result in the alleviation of their marginalization.

It is, however, recommended that policymakers and TVET authorities make joint and serious initiatives to create an enabling environment where all stakeholders have access to education without any discrimination. Equality/equity should be the primary focus of national TVET policies. Attitudes towards



religious tolerance must be promoted, existing laws against discrimination should be implemented in a true way, and proportionate representation of religious minorities should be ensured. Advocacy can work towards developing a Christian-friendly environment, which may also lead to more Christian youth joining TVET programs in huge numbers. A multi-pronged approach targeting both systemic and societal barriers is called for to enable religious minorities to access vocational education as required.

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