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Christian Religious Minorities of Pakistan and their Satisfaction with Higher Education and Mental Wellbeing

Amber Bajwa

Research Assistant, Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College
(A Chartered University), Lahore, Pakistan

Corresponding author

amberbajwa68@gmail.com

Sara Rizvi Jafree

Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, Forman Christian College,
Lahore, Pakistan

sarajafree@fccollege.edu.pk

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Abstract

The persecution of the Christian religious minorities in Pakistan has implications on exclusion faced in higher educational institutes and mental wellbeing, which ultimately may prevent Christian youth agency. This is one of the first studies in the country that aimed to investigate the relationship between satisfaction with higher education and mental health of Christian students ($N = 100$) from a large urban city. Mean comparisons suggest that females, those attending public sector institutes, and unemployed Christian students have lower satisfaction with higher education institutes and lower mental wellbeing. Multiple linear regression reveals that mental health is predicted by two domains of satisfaction with higher education- (i) teaching and learning ($t = 1.62$, $p = 0.049$); and (ii) student management and guidance by administration. Our study concludes that Christian minorities with intersectional disadvantages who are dissatisfied with higher education face more mental health issues and need targeted interventions to improve educational inequalities and mental wellbeing.

Keywords

Christian youth – higher education – mental wellbeing – Pakistan

1 Introduction

Historically, all the religious minorities of Pakistan have faced persecution including the Christian, Hindus, Ahmadis, Shia Muslims, and the Sikhs.¹ The Christian community, estimated at 1.4% of the Pakistani population, are known to suffer from socioeconomic marginalization and structural discrimination, while remaining bereft of social welfare protection and security.² The recent Jaranwala incident of 2023 is testimony to the persecution faced by Christians in Pakistan in which false allegations of blasphemy against two Christian residents of Jaranwala, Faisalabad district of Pakistan, led to over 20 churches and more than 80 Christian houses being destroyed by extremist mobs.³ This incident has left the Christian community grieved and uncertain about their future safety and opportunities for advancement in the country. There is pressing need to understand how Christian youth enrolled at universities see their chances for progress in the country, as they have the potential to lead efforts for equal opportunities of their less privileged community members.

1.1 *Higher Education Opportunities for Christian Youth*

Policy-makers agree that unless minorities gain higher education and enter into significant positions across the economy and society, there is less possibility for the group to assume agency in the country.⁴ Integration in higher education of religious minorities also has the benefit of mobilizing inter-religious dialogue, improving interfaith harmony, and putting pressure on institutes to promote inclusion of religious minorities.⁵ Though the Christian community has contributed significantly to the education of the country, ironically it is the

1 Fuchs, M. M., & Fuchs, S. W. (2020). Religious minorities in Pakistan: Identities, citizenship and social belonging. *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, 43(1), 52–67.

2 Patras, A. I. (2024). Examining Pakistan's Relationship with Religious Minorities: A Case Study of the Christian Community. *NUST Journal of International Peace & Stability*, 80–94.

3 Ahmad, A., Ahmed, S. W., ur Rehman, S. M., Amin, I. M., & Sheraz, M. A. (2023). Protection and Respect of Non-Muslims in Pakistan, An Analytical Study in the Context of Jaranwala Incident. *OEconomia*, 6(2), 423–433.

4 Perez, V. H., & Gong, Y. (2005). Increasing minority students' access to graduate schools. *InterActions: UCLA Journal of Education and Information Studies*, 1(2).

5 Edwards, S. (2018). Critical reflections on the interfaith movement: A social justice perspective. *Journal of Diversity in Higher Education*, 11(2), 164.

Christian youth who are found less in number in higher education institutes, and are also known to face exclusion and discrimination in the education sector.⁶ In higher educational institutes specifically the Christian youth are known to face significant challenges rooted in religious discrimination, curriculum biases, and limited access to quality education.⁷ These educational inequalities, compounded by socioeconomic disparities, are also known to profoundly impact the mental wellbeing of religious and ethnic minorities, with subsequent consequences on academic achievement and retention.⁸

Christian religious minorities in the country are also known to have low trust in institutional mechanisms, and thus have lesser motivation to answer questions about satisfaction with educational opportunities.⁹ For these students, the act of providing feedback on their educational experiences may feel futile, as they perceive their voices to be undervalued or ignored by university administrations.¹⁰ Minority students may also hesitate to provide feedback or appeal for better opportunities at educational institutes due to the fear that it could negatively impact their academic standing or relationships with administration and faculty.¹¹ This reluctance is particularly evident in public universities, where Christian students report feeling isolated and unsupported.¹² When students feel that their concerns are not acknowledged or addressed, it can lead to feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and disengagement from the educational process.¹³

1.2 *Mental Health of Christian Community*

The Christian community in Pakistan is known to suffer from mental health challenges due to cultural and historical issues of excluding religious minorities

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- 6 Farooq, A., & Sohail, T. (2019). Conceptualization of religious belonging of Christian youth in higher education. *Journal of Islamic Thought and Civilization*, 9(2), 253–271.
 - 7 Haroon, S., Khan, F. A., & Khan, N. Z. (2019). Personal Traits, Familial Characteristics and Success in the Labor Market: A Survey Study of Christian Labor Force in Pakistan. *Forman Journal of Economic Studies*, 15.
 - 8 Bowman, N. A., & Toms Smedley, C. (2013). The forgotten minority: Examining religious affiliation and university satisfaction. *Higher Education*, 65, 745–760.
 - 9 Khan, S., & Ali, R. (2022). Educational experiences of religious minorities in Pakistan: A case study of Christian students. *Journal of Minority Studies*, 15(3), 45–60.
 - 10 Riaz, S. (2020). Inclusive education in Pakistan: Challenges and opportunities for religious minorities. Islamabad, Pakistan: HRCP Publications.
 - 11 Ahmed, F., & Malik, S. (2021). Mental health challenges among religious minorities in Pakistan. *Journal of Psychology and Social Science*, 12(2), 78–92.
 - 12 Pakistan Institute of Education (PIE). (2021). Higher education access and equity in Pakistan. Islamabad, Pakistan: PIE.
 - 13 Lund Dean, K., & Jolly, J. P. (2012). Student identity, disengagement, and learning. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 11(2), 228–243.

in the country.¹⁴ Existing local research suggests that Christian university students may have lower life satisfaction, self-esteem, and mental wellbeing in Pakistan,¹⁵ especially Christian female university students.¹⁶ Compounding factors can contribute to greater mental health burden in Christian community, and especially the youth, such as intergenerational trauma and narrations from elders about historic abuse,¹⁷ the silence and misrepresentation by social media and news agencies,¹⁸ and various forms of abuse such as structural discrimination, random killings, and forced conversion.¹⁹

The main issues within the higher education services that can compromise mental wellbeing in minorities includes lack of administration support, teacher biases and exclusion, and lack of opportunities for academic and social activities.^{20,21,22} Local research suggests that discrimination in the education sector contributes to stress and depression in Christian students.²³ Scholars have also highlighted the role of sociodemographic backgrounds in contributing

- 14 Yusuf, H. (2020). Culture and mental health in Pakistan. In *The Routledge International Handbook of Race, Culture and Mental Health* (pp. 434–444). Routledge.
- 15 Iqbal, S., Ahmad, R., & Ayub, N. (2013). Self-esteem: a comparative study of adolescents from mainstream and minority religious groups in Pakistan. *Journal of immigrant and minority health*, 15, 49–56.
- 16 Butt, D. S., Majeed, A., Khawar, R., Asad, S., & Hussain, S. (2023). Personality, religiosity and satisfaction with life in young Muslim and Christian women in Pakistan. *Journal of religion and health*, 62(5), 3382–3398.
- 17 Istratii, R., & Ali, P. (2023). A scoping review on the role of religion in the experience of IPV and faith-based responses in community and counseling settings. *Journal of psychology and theology*, 51(2), 141–173.
- 18 Ittefaq, M., Ejaz, W., Jamil, S., Iqbal, A., & Arif, R. (2023). Discriminated in society and marginalized in media: Social representation of Christian sanitary workers in Pakistan. *Journalism Practice*, 17(1), 66–84.
- 19 Pio, E., & Syed, J. (2016). *Marked by the cross: The persecution of Christians in Pakistan*. Faith-based violence and Deobandi militancy in Pakistan, 187–207.
- 20 Shaukat, S., Ayub, N., & Tarar, A. H. (2021). Students' identity and mental well-being among Muslims and Christians in Pakistan. *Pakistan Journal of Psychological Research*, 36(2), 263–278.
- 21 Manejwala, R., & Abu-Ras, W. (2019). Microaggressions on the university campus and the undergraduate experiences of Muslim south Asian women. *Journal of Muslim Mental Health*, 13(1).
- 22 Liverpool, S., Moinuddin, M., Bracegirdle, K., Eddison, J., Joseph, S., Aithal, S., & Karkou, V. (2024). Mental health coping strategies and support needs among marginalised further and higher education students in the UK: A cross-sectional study. *PLOS Mental Health*, 1(1), e000046.
- 23 Iqbal, S., Ahmad, R., Ayub, N. (2012). Level of depression among adolescents of religious minorities and their dominant counterparts in Pakistan. *Journal of Child Adolescent Mental Health*, 24(2), 163–171. <https://doi.org/10.2989/17280583.2012.735506>.

to social segregation and underachievement in the education sector.²⁴ Such, segregation and low achievement can further compound mental health issues in students and result in lower morale, optimism, and hopes for the future.²⁵ In the context of Pakistan, where the Christians minorities are found in the lower socioeconomic strata, the dual burden of poverty and religious discrimination significantly undermines satisfaction with educational experience and mental health.

2 Aim, Significance and Hypothesis of Study

There is urgent need in Pakistan to assess issues of satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing in Christian youth and plan effective policies to secure equitable educational opportunities and improve mental health. Academic and health exclusion within the higher education sector, can sustain the intergenerational transfer of educational and economic disadvantages in religious minorities, worsening inequalities and oppression.²⁶ Christian youth, particularly those from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, are at a heightened risk of being excluded from higher education opportunities, contributing to mental health disparities.²⁷ This study seeks to fill the gap in existing research and aims to assess differences in satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing based on socio-demographic backgrounds of Christian youth, and to identify the relationship between satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing.

The findings would inform policy decisions and contribute to the development of targeted interventions that can ensure better higher education opportunities and mental health services for Christian youth. The hypotheses of the study include:

24 Burger, K. (2019). The socio-spatial dimension of educational inequality: A comparative European Analysis. *Studies in Educational Evaluation*. <https://doi.org/10.1016/J.STUEDUC.2019.03.009>.

25 Katikireddi, S. V., Niedzwiedz, C. L., & Popham, F. (2016). Employment status and income as potential mediators of educational inequalities in population mental health. *European Journal of Public Health*, 26(5), 814–816. <https://doi.org/10.1093/eurpub/ckw126>.

26 Kromydas, T. (2017). Rethinking higher education and its relationship with social inequalities: past knowledge, present state and future potential. *Palgrave communications*, 3(1), 1–12.

27 Jury, M., Smeding, A., Stephens, N. M., Nelson, J. E., Aelenei, C., & Darnon, C. (2017). The experience of low-SES students in higher education: Psychological barriers to success and interventions to reduce social-class inequality. *Journal of Social Issues*, 73(1), 23–41.

1. Sociodemographic backgrounds of Christian minority students have a relationship with satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing. We hypothesize that sociodemographic variables- such as age, gender, monthly household income, type of university, degree enrollment, and employment status- have a role in satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing.
2. Higher education institutes and the services that they provide specifically related to (i) teaching and student learning; (ii) student management and guidance by administration; and (iii) academic and cultural life, have an influence on mental wellbeing. We hypothesize that when satisfaction with higher education is high, mental wellbeing will also be high in Christian minority students.

3 Methodology

3.1 *Research Design and Ethics*

This was a cross-sectional quantitative survey, based on purposive sampling. Ethics approval was taken from the Institutional Review Board of Forman Christian College University, before data collection. Informed consent was taken from respondents and they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Permission was also taken from the three higher education institutes for data collection from their Christian students. Names of the institutes are anonymized to secure safety of respondents, who are few in number. The first author, who is from the Christian community, collected the data to ensure respondents felt safe and comfortable.

3.2 *Sample and Data Collection*

Data was collected from Lahore city, which according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics,²⁸ is home to one of the largest Christian population groups in the country standing at 571,365 people. A large proportion (71.6%) of the Christian youth is under the age of 25;²⁹ however, only 22% of the population can read or write, and a mere 0.4% enter into higher education institutes.³⁰ The selection

28 Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017, <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/sites/default/files/population/2017/results/05309.pdf>.

29 Challenges of Christian Youth in Pakistan-Peoples' Pakistan, Pak Enterprise for Sustainable Development Pvt.Ltd, https://ppicollaboration.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/Challenges-of-Christian-Youth-in-Pakistan-People_s-Perspective.pdf.

30 Butt, S. A. (2023). Contextualizing Economic Challenges and Opportunities of Minorities in Pakistan; A Case Study of Christian Community in Lahore. *Pakistan Vision*, 24(2), 19.

criterion was Christian students above the age of 18 years, enrolled in an undergraduate program for the last two years at least, or having completed an Undergraduate program and being enrolled in a Postgraduate program. Data was collected from three higher education institutes- two of which were private and one was which was a public higher education institute. Private spaces were provided by the institutes to collect the data. Though the target was to collect data from more than 300 students, and the data collector/ primary author of this study was a Christian herself, we were able to sample only 100 respondents.

The main reasons for low response included: (i) lack of willingness to answer questions related to health and wellbeing in a persecuted community, (ii) low motivation to answer questions about satisfaction with educational opportunities in the university setting, and (iii) general fear and reluctance to participate in survey research post the Jaranwala church arsons. Data was collected between the three months of December 2023 to February 2024. Participants were sent an online Google survey on their phone if they gave initial consent to participate in the study. The first author was available to answer any questions during survey completion. The data was collected in a private space provided by the higher education institutes.

3.3 *Measures*

Two standardized measures were used to collect data. The Student Satisfaction Scale for Educational Inequality³¹ was used to measure satisfaction with higher education, using a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from 'strongly disagree' (1) to 'strongly agree' (5). Higher scores, implied greater satisfaction of student respondents. Items measuring three domains from the scale were used, including: 'Teaching and learning'; 'Student management and guidance by administration'; and 'Academic and cultural life'. The Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale³² was used to assess mental wellbeing, employing a 5 point Likert Scale ranging from 'None of the time' (1) to 'All of the time' (5). Higher scores, suggest better mental wellbeing of the student. The questions prompt the students to indicate how they feel in the last two weeks, and are described as falling under the following areas, which we have used for organization of tabular information

31 Liu, Y., Wang, Y.-S., & Wu, T.-J. (2017). Student satisfaction scale development and application for sport management in China. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 13(5), 1429–1444. <https://doi.org/10.12973/eurasia.2017.00677a>.

32 Tennant, R., Hiller, L., Fishwick, R., Platt, S., Joseph, S., Weich, S., & Stewart-Brown, S. (2007). The Warwick-Edinburgh mental well-being scale (WEMWBS): development and UK validation. *Health and Quality of Life Outcomes*, 5(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1477-7525-5-63>.

(Table 4): ‘Hedonic and eudemonic aspects of mental health’; ‘Interpersonal relationships’; ‘Positive functioning’; and ‘Autonomy’.

3.4 Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using SPSS 25.0. Descriptive results were derived to present the sociodemographic characteristics of Christian youth, and independent sample T tests were run to Compare mean values for the satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing based on socio-demographic backgrounds. Regression analysis was used to address the relationship between satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing, with mental wellbeing considered the dependent variable. Both study domains (‘satisfaction with higher education’ and ‘mental wellbeing’) were compounded before regression tests were applied, and the three sub-domains of ‘satisfaction with higher education’ were compounded separately- ‘Teaching and learning’; ‘Student management and guidance by administration’; and ‘Academic and cultural life’. Model 1 included only the three sub-domains of ‘satisfaction with higher education’; Model 2 then adds two sociodemographic variables of age and gender; and Model 3 then adds university type, education level, monthly household income, and current employment. T values of the regression results are reported to show the confidence we have in the coefficient as a predictor. P values of less than 0.05 were considered significant for this study. Reliability results for the study domains were satisfactorily high (Table 1).

TABLE 1 Reliability results for study domains, and sub-domains

	Items	Cronbach Alpha
Mental Wellbeing	11	0.928
Satisfaction with higher education	10	0.839
Teaching and Learning Satisfaction (Sub-domain of ‘Satisfaction with higher education’)	4	0.847
Student Management and Guidance by Administration Satisfaction (Sub-domain of ‘Satisfaction with higher education’)	4	0.838
Academic and Cultural Life Satisfaction (Sub-domain of ‘Satisfaction with higher education’)	3	0.786

4 Results

4.1 Descriptive Results

Majority of the sample age group is between 18 to 25 years (62%), as is characteristic of a university population (Table 2). More females are part of the sample (75%) and the private higher education sector (62%). Most are enrolled in an Undergraduate (79%) program and belong to the lower-income middle class households of Pakistan, with a monthly household income of less than

TABLE 2 Sociodemographic characteristics of study respondents (N = 100)

Variables	(%)
Age	
18–21 years	25%
22–25 years	27%
26–29 years	25%
30 years and above	23%
Gender	
Male	25%
Female	75%
University type	
Private	62%
Public	38%
Current Educational Enrollment	
Undergraduate	79%
Postgraduate	21%
Monthly Household (PKR)	
Less than PKR 99,999	82%
More than PKR 100,000	18%
Currently Employed	
Permanent contract	39%
Temporary contract	14%
Not employed	47%

PKR 99,999/ USD 358.89.³³ More than half are working simultaneously while pursuing their higher education in permanent contracts (39%) or temporary contracts (14%).

4.2 *Mean Results*

Table 3 presents the mean comparison for satisfaction with higher education based on gender (male versus female), type of institution (public versus private), and the employment status of the student (employed versus unemployed). For gender, we find that male Christian youth have higher satisfaction with social activities, compared to females ($p = 0.031$). With regards type of institution, we find that private institutes provide: (i) more overall support ($p = 0.000$); (ii) better social activities ($p = 0.002$); (iii) better administration attitude ($p = 0.026$); (iv) better teacher efforts to impart theoretical knowledge and practical experiences ($p = 0.031$); (v) better teacher evaluation methods ($p = 0.050$); and (vi) better academic activities ($p = 0.050$). In the mean comparison for employment, we find that employed Christian student's show greater satisfaction for: (i) administration attitude ($p = 0.029$); (ii) examination management ($p = 0.049$); (iii) learning atmosphere ($p = 0.050$); and (iv) teaching methods ($p = 0.050$).

Table 4 presents the mean comparison for mental wellbeing based on gender, type of institution, and the employment status of the student. We find that male Christian students have a greater ability to make up their own minds about things, compared to females ($p = 0.050$). Students from the private educational institutes have better mental wellbeing with respect to: (i) dealing with problems ($p = 0.001$); (ii) feeling loved ($p = 0.002$); (iii) ability to make up their own minds ($p = 0.007$); and (iv) being interested in other people ($p = 0.037$). Employed Christian students are more optimistic for the future ($p = 0.011$).

4.3 *Regression Results*

Table 5 presents the regression results for the association between mental wellbeing and satisfaction with higher education. No significant results were found between academic and cultural life and mental wellbeing of students. Model 1 suggests that when satisfaction with teaching and learning is high ($t = 1.74$, $p = 0.044$), mental wellbeing is also high. Similarly, when student management and guidance by administration is high ($t = 3.81$, $p = 0.000$), mental wellbeing is also high. There is no change in association or significance in model two. However, in model 3 teaching and learning becomes insignificant

33 Pakistan Social & Living Standards Measurement Survey (PSLM) 2018–19 National / Provincial (Social Report) <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/pslm-publications>.

TABLE 3 Mean results for satisfaction with higher education according to sociodemographic variables (gender, type of institution, and degree level)

	Gender	M (SD) - P value	Type of Institution	M (SD) - P value	Degree Level	M (SD) - P value
Teaching and Learning Satisfaction						
Learning Atmosphere	Male	2.96 (1.39) - 0.281	Public	2.87 (1.14) - 0.464	Employed	3.26 (1.40) - 0.050
	Female	3.57 (1.19)	Private	3.76 (1.23)	Unemployed	3.00 (1.35)
Teaching methods	Male	3.04 (1.24) - 0.561	Public	2.71 (1.08) - 0.870	Employed	3.21 (1.34) - 0.050
	Female	3.33 (1.20)	Private	3.60 (1.16)	Unemployed	3.07 (1.26)
Theoretical knowledge & practical experiences	Male	2.60 (1.41) - 0.282	Public	2.16 (0.97) - 0.031	Employed	2.72 (1.37) - 0.362
	Female	2.73 (1.24)	Private	3.03 (1.34)	Unemployed	2.43 (1.08)
Evaluation method	Male	2.60 (1.19) - 0.865	Public	2.11 (0.98) - 0.050	Employed	2.90 (1.29) - 0.388
	Female	2.95 (1.27)	Private	3.32 (1.18)	Unemployed	2.71 (1.20)
Student Management and Guidance by Administration Satisfaction						
Administration attitude	Male	2.56 (1.35) - 0.605	Public	2.24 (0.98) - 0.026	Employed	3.10 (1.42) - 0.029
	Female	2.96 (1.27)	Private	3.24 (1.31)	Unemployed	2.79 (1.42)
Examination management	Male	2.84 (1.43) - 0.439	Public	2.37 (1.19) - 0.170	Employed	3.18 (1.52) - 0.049
	Female	3.12 (1.35)	Private	3.47 (1.31)	Unemployed	3.07 (1.32)
Opinions and complaint channels	Male	2.72 (1.33) - 0.928	Public	2.00 (1.04) - 0.075	Employed	3.23 (1.40) - 0.192
	Female	2.88 (1.38)	Private	3.35 (1.29)	Unemployed	2.86 (1.61)

TABLE 3 Mean results for satisfaction with higher education according to sociodemographic variables (gender, type of institution, and degree level) (cont.)

	Gender	M (SD) - P value	Type of Institution	M (SD) - P value	Degree Level	M (SD) - P value
Overall support	Male	3.56 (1.32) - 0.438	Public	2.68 (0.98) - 0.000	Employed	2.95 (1.45) - 0.164
	Female	2.89 (1.36)	Private	3.68 (1.44)	Unemployed	3.43 (1.55)
Academic and Cultural Life Satisfaction						
Academic activities	Male	3.20 (1.52) - 0.116	Public	3.11 (1.20) - 0.050	Employed	3.41 (1.39) - 0.346
	Female	3.17 (1.30)	Private	3.23 (1.45)	Unemployed	2.79 (1.31)
Social activities	Male	2.52 (1.68) - 0.031	Public	1.74 (1.15) - 0.002	Employed	2.36 (1.56) - 0.453
	Female	2.24 (1.39)	Private	2.66 (1.53)	Unemployed	1.93 (1.32)
Internship activities	Male	2.11 (1.08) - 0.931	Public	2.71 (1.05) -	Employed	2.96 (1.78) - 0.713
	Female	2.13 (1.19)	Private	0.5432.16 (1.88)	Unemployed	2.14 (1.02)

TABLE 4 Mean results for mental wellbeing according to sociodemographic variables (gender, type of institution, and degree level)

Gender		M (SD) - P value	Type of Institution	M (SD) - P value	Degree Level	M (SD) - P value
Hedonic and eudemonic aspects of mental health						
Optimistic about future	Male	3.56 (1.22) - 0.392	Public	3.58 (1.05) - 0.973	Employed	3.79 (0.90) - 0.011
	Female	3.83 (1.12)	Private	3.87 (1.19)	Unemployed	3.77 (1.31)
Feeling good	Male	3.76 (1.12) - 0.616	Public	3.58 (0.85) - 0.083	Employed	3.77 (0.98) - 0.258
	Female	3.65 (1.00)	Private	3.74 (1.13)	Unemployed	3.53 (1.12)
Feeling relaxed	Male	3.44 (1.12) - 0.974	Public	2.97 (1.10) - 0.529	Employed	3.31 (1.08) - 0.944
	Female	3.17 (1.15)	Private	3.40 (1.15)	Unemployed	3.02 (1.20)
Interpersonal relationships						
Interested in other people	Male	3.36 (1.22) - 0.341	Public	3.11 (0.95) - 0.037	Employed	3.54 (0.09) - 0.593
	Female	3.27 (1.11)	Private	3.40 (1.23)	Unemployed	3.15 (1.14)
Feeling loved	Male	3.76 (1.26) - 0.272	Public	3.60 (0.82) - 0.002	Employed	3.79 (1.08) - 0.358
	Female	3.60 (1.05)	Private	3.71 (1.26)	Unemployed	3.36 (1.15)
Positive functioning						
Feeling confident	Male	3.96 (1.20) - 0.678	Public	3.63 (0.97) - 0.126	Employed	3.77 (1.13) - 0.640
	Female	3.56 (1.08)	Private	3.68 (1.21)	Unemployed	3.43 (1.15)

TABLE 4 Mean results for mental wellbeing according to sociodemographic variables (gender, type of institution, and degree level) (cont.)

Gender		M (SD) - P value		Type of Institution	M (SD) - P value		Degree Level	M (SD) - P value	
Thinking clearly	Male	3.64 (1.25)- 0.320		Public	3.58 (0.98)- 0.176		Employed	3.72 (1.05)- 0.146	
	Female	3.68 (1.08)		Private	3.73 (1.27)		Unemployed	3.53 (1.19)	
Interested in new things	Male	3.76 (1.23)- 0.326		Public	3.74 (0.92)- 0.254		Employed	3.87 (1.03)- 0.209	
	Female	3.87 (1.03)		Private	3.90 (1.16)		Unemployed	3.87 (1.15)	
Energy to spare	Male	3.36 (1.15)- 0.699		Public	3.00 (1.04)- 0.572		Employed	3.36 (0.98)- 0.874	
	Female	3.19 (1.06)		Private	3.37 (1.09)		Unemployed	3.00 (1.10)	
Autonomy									
Dealing with problems well	Male	3.76 (1.12)- 0.941		Public	3.39 (0.76)- 0.001		Employed	3.64 (1.03)- 0.369	
	Female	3.44 (1.06)		Private	3.74 (1.23)		Unemployed	3.28 (1.15)	
Able to make up my own mind about things	Male	3.84 (1.24)- 0.050		Public	3.76 (0.79)- 0.007		Employed	3.90 (0.99)- 0.155	
	Female	3.72 (0.94)		Private	3.89 (1.14)		Unemployed	3.66 (1.19)	

TABLE 5 Association between mental wellbeing and satisfaction with higher education

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Teaching and learning	1.74 (0.044)	1.62 (0.049)	1.53 (0.090)
Student management and guidance by administration	3.81 (0.000)	4.32 (0.000)	4.47 (0.000)
Academic and cultural life	0.545 (0.587)	0.104 (0.918)	0.149 (0.299)

Model 1 is the raw estimation with no controls; Model 2 is Model 1 + age and gender; Model 3 is the same as Model 2 with the addition of university type (private versus public), education level (undergraduate versus postgraduate), monthly household income, and currently employed

and only student management and guidance by administration remains significant in its association with mental wellbeing ($t = 4.47$, $p = 0.000$). The results suggest that initial satisfaction with teaching and learning is driven by sociodemographic background characteristics of university type, education level, monthly household income, and employment status.

5 Discussion

This study attempts to understand the relationship between satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing of Christian youth. Much emphasis of past research in Pakistan has been on general persecution of Christian religious minorities and the challenges faced in primary and secondary schooling; whereas no research was found related to what the current study is addressing.³⁴ Very few Christian youth enter into higher education, due to their multiple and intersectional disprivileges,³⁵ and we find in this study that their ability to gain agency and capabilities is hampered by educational inequalities and mental health issues.

34 Gregory, S. (2016). Under the shadow of Islam: The plight of the Christian minority in Pakistan. In *Pakistan in National and Regional Change* (pp. 23–40). Routledge.

35 Butt, S. A. (2023). Contextualizing Economic Challenges and Opportunities of Minorities in Pakistan; A Case Study of Christian Community in Lahore. *Pakistan Vision*, 24(2), 19.

The first hypothesis of this study tested the role of sociodemographic backgrounds as predictors for the two study domains- satisfaction with higher education and mental wellbeing.

With respect to satisfaction with higher education, we found that Christian females have low satisfaction with social activities offered by their educational institute. In the context of Pakistan, local research also suggests that Christian females face restrictions from their families to engage in social activities, and that the social activities offered by higher education institutes may not fit into the boundaries established by parents and guardians.³⁶ Other research from the Muslim world confirms that female minorities in the university setting face barriers to participating in social activities due to limited facilities, domination of male students in social events and resources, and cultural barriers at the institute.³⁷

Christian students enrolled in public higher educational institutes are not satisfied overall with administrative support, attitudes of administration, and support for social and academic activities. Similarly, teachers in public institutes were found to make less efforts to impart theoretical knowledge with practical experiences and their evaluation methods were inferior. Previous local research has highlighted that students are not satisfied with administrative quality, core educational and teaching quality, and support facilities of their universities,³⁸ and that additionally public sector universities have more quality issues in the country compared to their private counterparts.³⁹ Our study is further able to highlight that Christian students may be facing even more discrimination and exclusion by administration due to their religious belonging and the perception by the public sector administration and teachers that unfair treatment will not result in complaints by minorities.⁴⁰

36 ur Rehman, T. (2019). Civic Engagement of Christian Women in Pakistan. *Center for Open Access in Science* ■ [https://www. centerprode. com/ojas. html](https://www.centerprode.com/ojas.html) *Open Journal for Anthropological Studies*, 3(1), 1–10.

37 Aljehani, N., Razee, H., Ritchie, J., Valenzuela, T., Bunde-Birouste, A., & Alkhaldi, G. (2022). Exploring female university Students' participation in physical activity in Saudi Arabia: a mixed-methods study. *Frontiers in public health*, 10, 829296.

38 Mastoi, A. G., Hai, L. X., & Saengkrod, W. (2019). Higher education service quality based on students' satisfaction in Pakistan. *European Scientific Journal ESJ*, 15(11), 32–62.

39 Usman, S. (2014). Governance and Higher Education in Pakistan: What Roles Do Boards of Governors Play in Ensuring the Academic Quality Maintenance in Public Universities versus Private Universities in Pakistan?. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 3(2), 38–51.

40 Rosik, C. H., & Smith, L. L. (2009). Perceptions of religiously based discrimination among Christian students in secular and Christian university settings. *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 1(4), 207.

We also found that compared to employed Christian students, unemployed Christian students reported low satisfaction for administration attitude, examination management by administration, and learning atmosphere and teaching methods of instructors. This finding confirms other local scholarship that minority students who are also working students show greater satisfaction and wellbeing in the country.⁴¹ Both religious and ethnic minorities are known to have strong expectations from their higher education institutes to allow them to work while studying, help them to find jobs matching their degree and skills, and to provide them security of job placement.⁴² Coming from low sociodemographic backgrounds, when Christian minority students are not supported with employment opportunities while studying, it may contribute to low satisfaction with administration and teachers in other areas of support not directly related to job placement support.

Results suggest that female Christian students are indecisive and not able to make up their own mind about things. A study about Christian minorities in Turkey reports that students are indecisive about several issues such as if they should continue education and where they should apply for jobs, because of lack of administrative efforts to support minority students and mobilize resources for them.⁴³ We also found that Christian students enrolled in public sector institutes have lower mental wellbeing with respect to autonomy, their ability to make up their own minds, and that they have unsatisfactory interpersonal relationships. Other studies have also found that minority students at university have trouble developing autonomy and social connections, due to a collectivist culture which favors the majority⁴⁴ and macroaggressions at the university, which may include acts of bias, discrimination, and environmental oppression.⁴⁵

Some research highlights that working students may display more stress and anxiety about the future, as they may be more aware of the limitations of

41 Akram, M., Nasar, A., & Rehman, A. (2021). Religious minority rights and their satisfaction in Pakistan. *International Journal on Minority and Group Rights*, 29(1), 87–101.

42 Ecklund, K. (2013). First-generation social and ethnic minority students in Christian universities: Student recommendations for successful support of diverse students. *Christian Higher Education*, 12(3), 159–180.

43 Hendek, A., 2021. Religious education reform in Turkey: Issues and outcomes. *The Bloomsbury handbook of religious education in the global south*, pp. 47–64.

44 Neff, K. D., Brabeck, K. M., & Kearney, L. K. (2006). Relationship styles of self-focused autonomy, other-focused connection, and mutuality among Mexican American and European American college students. *The Journal of social psychology*, 146(5), 568–590.

45 Farber, R., Wedell, E., Herchenroeder, L., Dickter, C. L., Pearson, M. R., & Bravo, A. J. (2021). Microaggressions and psychological health among college students: A moderated mediation model of rumination and social structure beliefs. *Journal of Racial and Ethnic Health Disparities*, 8(1), 245–255.

the job market, inadequate pay and inflationary pressures, and may also have less time for academic pursuits and getting good grades for better employment options.⁴⁶ However, in our study we found that unemployed Christian students showed less optimism for the future compared to their employed colleagues. This may be because access to jobs while enrolled at universities builds career optimism and confidence in youth, and also develops their negotiations skills with employers, their experience and control over the work environment, and their networks for career building.⁴⁷

The second hypothesis of the study attempted to establish if satisfaction with higher education predicted mental wellbeing. We found a positive and significant relationship between satisfaction with teaching and learning at higher education institutes and favorable mental wellbeing, and that the relationship remains significant when controlling from 'effects' of variables such as age, gender, university type, education level, monthly household income, and employment status. In the Pakistan context, as with other developing countries, the teacher quality and care to meet learning objectives of students is the most important predictor for wellbeing in students.⁴⁸ Though there is a positive and significant relationship between student management and guidance by administration and mental wellbeing, with no change based on inclusion of age and gender in the model, this relationship loses significance when variables of university type, education level, monthly household income, and employment status are entered. This may be because administration support is strongly influenced by intersectional disadvantage of religious minorities.⁴⁹ This research suggests that though Christian religious minority students in Pakistan need support for mental wellbeing, there is need for more specific care and intervention for religious minorities from public sector universities, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and those who are not employed and are enrolled in undergraduate programs.

46 Mounsey, R., Vandehey, M., & Diekhoff, G. (2013). Working and non-working university students: Anxiety, depression, and grade point average. *College Student Journal*, 47(2), 379–389.

47 Nerona, R. R., Hood, M., Bialocerkowski, A., & Creed, P. A. (2024). Optimistic About the Future: How Job and Study Resources Facilitate Career Optimism in Working Students. *Journal of Career Assessment*, 10690727241287531.

48 Wang, T. (2023). Teachers as the agent of change for student mental health: the role of teacher care and teacher support in Chinese students' well-being. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 14, 1283515.

49 Fay, D. L., Hicklin Fryar, A., Meier, K. J., & Wilkins, V. (2021). Intersectionality and equity: Dynamic bureaucratic representation in higher education. *Public Administration*, 99(2), 335–352.

5.1 *Limitations and Strengths of this Study*

There were some limitations of this study, such as the small sample and data collection from only one major city, which makes generalizations difficult. Recent mob violence against the Christian community and fear of repercussions from participating in a study that records data for dissatisfaction with university authorities contributed to low response. However, this is the first study that has attempted to address questions of higher education satisfaction and mental health in Christian religious minorities of Pakistan in a period when persecution and religious intolerance is at its peak in the country. Future research may attempt to sample Christian youth across universities of Pakistan, and also present comparative satisfaction and mental wellbeing data with other minority groups and the dominant Muslim population, which would present a broader picture for necessary policy planning.

6 Concluding Recommendations

The study findings conclude that mental wellbeing of Christian youth is influenced by university administration and teaching quality, and that intersectionality is also an issue, with more socio-economically disprivileged Christian students suffering from greater mental health challenges. Thus, there is need for targeted interventions to address the educational inequalities and mental health challenges faced by Christian youth in Pakistan. Bridging the educational inequalities, especially in the public sector, is possible through implementation of better quality control mechanisms of administration, third-party monitoring of quality services, and teacher training in cultural competency to support religious minorities and students from diverse backgrounds. In addition, there must be mandatory inclusion of health literacy education, health counseling services, and participation in regular therapy groups of minority students across higher education institutes of the country.

Institutes also need to make more concentrated efforts for career placement of religious minorities, which may include joint efforts by administration and state to establish quotas for hiring of minority graduates within universities and across other industrial sectors. Specific gender-centered findings suggest that females Christian students need more support to engage in social activities and networking, and to develop their autonomy and decision-making skills, which is crucial for development of their agency and capabilities. Interventions for women's equal opportunities in Pakistan rarely consider or include women religious minorities as beneficiaries, which must be carefully addressed. Finally, the recommendations for the Christian minority students have implications for other religious and ethnic minorities in the country and beyond.

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