

Religious behaviours and commitment among Muslim healthcare workers in Malaysia



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Religion is among the determinants of human beliefs and values in various societies, shaping people's behaviours in a range of life aspects, including the workplace. In view of the influence of religion in Malaysia, this issue becomes highly significant. With regard to the profound impact of religion on creating individual and collective behaviours, the present study aims to investigate the effects of religious behaviours (RBs) on organisational commitment (OC) among Malaysian healthcare workers (HCWs) in 2022, by a survey method implemented using standardised questionnaires for data collection. The statistical population comprised of 2500 HCWs from 10 hospitals in Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown and Malacca, Malaysia, selected by the simple random sampling among the Muslim staff. The data analysis was further fulfilled using the AMOS software package for structural equation modelling (SEM). In general, the study results demonstrated a significant and positive relationship between RBs and OC among Malaysian HCWs (p -value = 0.84, t -statistic = 6.50).

Contribution: As demonstrated by the study results, it is possible to inspire OC among employees through strengthening RBs and take advantages of the results. Thus, RBs shown by employees can definitely bring positive results to organisations; therefore, OC in Malaysian HCWs improves.

Keywords: religion; religiosity; religious behaviour; Islam; religious commitment; organisational commitment; commitment to work.

Introduction

Considering the ever-increasing expansion of modernity and its social, economic and psychological consequences and the significant impact of civilisation on the way of life and physical and mental health of humans, paying attention to the category of psychological and mental health becomes more and more important. The changes made in recent decades have created a deep intellectual and spiritual crisis in the modern world. As a result of these changes, people have experienced a huge void and gap in the field of life, and the lack of spiritual beliefs has prepared the ground for the occurrence of psychological diseases and incompatible behaviours. The statistics indicate that in the world in the last two decades, physical diseases have decreased and, significantly, psychological diseases have become more common (Nelson 2009). Over the last few years, religiosity and spirituality have been progressively spotted as a necessity for establishing numerous interactions with employees, customers and the society by managers, supervisors, employees and researchers in various organisations and groups (Rocha & Pinheiro 2021). The absence of interest in spirituality can be thus explained by the secular approach adopted towards reflecting on the organisational life cycle. The introduction of spirituality into organisations accordingly empowers employees to gain a more integrated perspective to their organisations, families and the society. Even though several definitions have been thus far presented for workplace spirituality, an abundance of definitions takes account of the dimension of meaningfulness and solidarity at work. Workplace spirituality correspondingly refers to cultivated sensitivity and importance in establishing effective communication by individuals towards the presence of God as well as communication with God, oneself, coworkers and the work environment in order to reach meaningfulness, purposefulness and integration, in line with the career growth (Van Der Walt & De Klerk 2015).

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Besides, religiosity entails having religious concerns (Koenig, Hamilton & Doolittle 2021) in a way that affects attitudes, tendencies and actions in individuals. On the other hand, fair behaviour and being committed to the assigned tasks have been highlighted in all major religions of the world. In Malaysia, religion has been regularly one of the constructive elements of the Malaysian culture and society, and among the important factors shaping changes and transformations. Therefore, religiosity can be a predictor of organisational commitment (OC) or commitment to work. For this reason, there is a need to direct one part of the research on organisations to the effect of religion on the performance of organisations and their workforce. Moreover, organisations are one of the main pillars of the society, established on its needs, with a leading role in its growth and development (Bhaskar & Mishra 2019). Human resources (HRs) are also deemed as the main elements of organisations, whose role is of utmost importance in their efficiency. Under the current evolving conditions, organisations must thus pay much attention to their HRs in order to realise the necessary efficiency and effectiveness and finally meet the defined goals. In view of that, whenever individuals have positive attitudes towards their job positions as well as the management of their affiliated units or organisations, their motivation to do better work increases, or vice versa.

Understanding OC in employees, as declared in many studies, is among the factors to reflect on organisational behaviours. Organisational commitment can be helpful in creating a healthy organisational atmosphere, promoting organisational ethics, raising motivation and boosting the efficiency and effectiveness of organisations (Al-Jabari & Ghazzawi 2019). For OC, like other organisational concepts, several definitions have been so far provided. Organisational commitment also represents the positive or negative attitudes of people towards the entire organisation, not only their jobs. In OC, someone finds a strong sense of loyalty towards an organisation and identifies it, and OC means the support and emotional connection with its goals and values, for the sake of the organisation itself and ahead of its instrumental values as a means to achieve other goals (Allen & Meyer 1997). However, with a proper understanding of the way the relationship and the dimensions of religiosity affect OC, managers can consider measures that are more appropriate in their planning, corresponding to the development of the dimensions of justice in an organisation, by provoking a sense of commitment. Employees and their loyalty to the values accordingly pave the grounds for the realisation of organisational goals. Lack of commitment can thus easily damage many of organisational investments in selecting, training and empowering employees, and then crystallise the positive results of employees' experiences in other organisations (Wadhwa & Verghese 2015). On the other hand, OC allows managers and planners to be in no doubt of the presence of HRs and perform long-term planning with much more confidence. Otherwise, leaving the workplace, absenteeism, lateness, no active participation and low levels of HR performance will do harm to the organisations. In this

respect, religion can play a pivotal role in people's perceptions of their OC and prevent absence, delay, maltreatment, etc., particularly in employees with regard to the teachings given to its followers, the values proposed, and the rewards and punishments considered for the good and bad deeds (Bentein et al. 2005).

As one of the main inputs of any organisation, HRs play a significant role in the quality and quantity of its staff. The growth and development of the workforce and the increase in their skills, creativity and knowledge at all levels of an organisation have been thus far considered a strategic priority for managers since the past, and it is still unchanged now (Ronquillo, Popa & Willems 2021). This issue has further drawn much more attention to the efficiency of HRs and determining their position and contribution in the production of goods and services, because one of the strategies in this way is to reflect on the role of HRs. Hospitals are typically defined as professional organisations that provide healthcare services and need continuous improvement because of the provision of high-quality services by intelligent and up-to-date people who are aware of public health issues. Unfortunately, the healthcare systems around the world are challenged by the lack of committed workforce and distribution of skills, which has caused the healthcare workers (HCWs) to work overtime and undergo high workloads. The current shortage of such staff is one of the major concerns in many countries, especially in Malaysia, since it affects the efficiency and effectiveness of the healthcare service systems. As HRs are at the core of the healthcare industry, and it has been proven that the shortage of committed HCWs is related to inconsistent events and aspects of hospital inefficiency, HR management and development in hospitals have become of particular importance. In sum, this study investigates the effects of religious behaviours (RBs) on OC among Muslim HCWs in Malaysia in 2022.

Literature review

Religious behaviours

Religiosity means demonstrating religious commitment in a way to influence one's attitudes, tendencies and actions. A religious person accordingly adheres to one's religion, and secondly, the consequences of religiosity, which can be seen in their personal and social thought, life and action. Religiosity is often utilised to describe the degree of commitment that an individual or group has to a religious belief system (Park 2017) and is related to human encounter and the way they deal with religion. In view of that, the difference between religion and religiosity is that religion, in its own sense, is a sacred thing and religiosity is a human thing (Njus & Scharmer 2020). Theoretically, adherence to religion means to act and oblige oneself to act in the direction of the decrees that have been placed by religious leaders for followers. In this regard, psychologists such as Freud reflect on religion to be mere illusions, caused by mental illnesses, and on the other hand, some consider it a very effective factor in reducing human internal problems all through history. In keeping with Islamic teachings, the present study puts more emphasis on the

positive effects of religiosity on improving human life. The phenomenon of religion and religiosity has been also discussed over time and in various scientific fields (viz. philosophy, sociology, psychology, theology, etc.), and numerous analytical models have been thus far presented. The model developed here is based on the theoretical model of Glock and Stark (1965), in which religiosity and RBs were described based on the belief-related, emotional (or experiential), ritualistic and consequential dimensions, as follows:

- **Belief-related dimension:** It examines the beliefs that the followers of a religion are expected to have. On the word of Weber, a belief system can govern certain actions by people. Weber also aimed to prove that beliefs could connect social actions by directing people's interests in particular directions (Grosby 2013).
- **Emotional dimension:** Known as the experiential dimension, it cares for the emotions, imaginations and feelings associated with having relationships with a divine essence, such as God or an ultimate or transcendent reality. Here, religion creates mental peace and happiness in individuals by making human sufferings meaningful and tolerable, as well as promising the eventual victory of justice in the world. Religion also stems from emotional pressures and tensions to help people during problems and brings a sense of peace (Bouma 2004).
- **Ritualistic dimension:** This dimension incorporates worships along with specific religious practices, such as prayers, fasting, involvement in religious ceremonies, etc., which are often expected to be fulfilled by the followers of all religions. As stated by Durkheim, the main social function of rituals is that they keep the sense of belonging to the group in people fresh. Accordingly, a person who practices the rituals feels much more relaxed thanks to emotional discharge and above all performs one's duties in society more effectively (Sheffield 2006).
- **Consequential dimension:** It delves into the effects of religious beliefs, practices and experiences on the daily life of followers. In this dimension, religiosity strengthens individuals' determination to comply with group norms and leads to better unity among the society members with other counterparts (Ipgrave 2019).

Religion according to the Holy Qur'an

In the Holy Qur'an, religion refers to a collection of religious, moral, jurisprudential and legal instructions placed at the disposal of human by God to manage the individual and the human society, and consequently raise human beings. As per Surah Al Imran, Ayat 19:

The religion before God is Islam (submission to His will), nor did the people of the book dissent therefrom except through envy of each other, after knowledge had come to them. But if any deny the signs of God, He is swift in calling to account.

In Surah Al Imran, Ayat 85:

If anyone desires a religion other than Islam (submission to God), never will it be accepted of him; and in the Hereafter he will be in the ranks of those who have lost (all spiritual good).

According to the Holy Qur'an, religion is also defined as religiosity, which actually denotes showing obedience, being bounded and adhering to the same religious, moral, jurisprudential and legal imperatives, given to human by God. This concept is often used in the Holy Qur'an, and it is even pronounced that the main meaning of the word religion in the Holy Qur'an is submission and being bounded to God's plans and regulations. This concept of religiosity includes recognition and heartfelt acceptance of monotheism, justice, prophethood, imamate, the hereafter and adherence to divine decrees. The meaning of the word religion in other ayats, such as Surah Al-Bayyina, Ayat 85, is the same as religiosity, because while Muslims pay much attention to their main mission and what is expected of them, they also mention sincere devotion and servitude as well as its main components, such as saying prayers and paying zakat, viz:

[A]nd they have been commanded no more than this, to worship God, offering Him sincere devotion, being true (in faith), to establish regular prayer, and to practice regular charity; and that is the religion right and straight.

Organisational commitment

Organisational commitment or commitment to work implies the relative degree of identification of individuals and their contribution to organisations. In other words, OC is the state in which a person wishes to remain as a member of the organisation, and it is their positive or negative attitudes towards the entire organisation in which they work. Organisational commitment is further considered as an important variable in understanding employee behaviour, so there are many reasons that an organisation should augment the levels of OC in its members. Regarding OC, several definitions and theoretical models have been thus far presented, including the model developed by Allen and Meyer (1997), mainly popular in the humanities because of its comprehensiveness and applicability. In the meantime, the model exploited as a theoretical one here considers OC to contain three components: affective, continuance and normative (Bonds 2017). In this way, affective commitment conveys the emotional attachment, identification and participation of employees in the organisation. Besides, continuance commitment is often related to the awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organisation and normative commitment shows the feelings of working in the organisation. This three-dimensional model is typically based on observing the similarities and differences in the one-dimensional models of OC, whose general argument was that commitment could bind individuals to organisations and this would reduce the likelihood of leaving jobs (Allen & Meyer 1990).

According to the OC model introduced by Allen and Meyer (1990), this variable had three components:

- **Affective commitment:** According to Allen and Meyer (1990), a person has emotional attachment to an organisation when they consider the organisation's goals as one of their own and is convinced that they should help the organisation

achieve its goals. Determining the individual's identity through the organisation also occurs when their values are harmonious with the organisational ones, so that the individual can internalize the organisation's values. In fact, a person who has a high affective commitment remains in the organisation, accepts its goals, makes efforts and even sacrifices oneself to achieve those goals (Jaros et al. 2017).

- Continuanance commitment: As the second component of the OC model proposed by Allen and Meyer (1990), the person calculates the costs of leaving the organisation. In other words, this type of obligation covers the expected costs of leaving. That is, a person's desire to stay in the organisation indicates that they need that job and cannot do anything else. Employees accordingly stay in the organisation because they need to stay. Because of the transactional nature of the continuance commitment, this type of obligation can be also called an exchange- or accounting-based commitment. Accordingly, the fewer job opportunities for a person outside the organisation and the more investments within it, the less likely it is to leave the jobs (Meyer et al. 2002).
- Normative commitment: There has been less research on this component, and Allen and Meyer (1990) are among the few theorists who have tried to detach normative commitment from other components of OC. They believe that normative commitment underlines the obligation of a person to stay in the organisation, or it shows a sense of agreement to continue working with the organisation. People with high normative commitment accordingly feel that they should stay in the organisation because of the investments made on them. This type of commitment does not necessarily reflect the internalised norms, but a special strong norm called the norm of reciprocity (Rusu 2013).

In the Holy Qur'an, covenants are often given special importance. Promises and commitments should not always be in writing and within the framework of legal pressures to be fulfilled out of compulsion. Keeping the promise and staying on the promise and commitment that has been expressed, yet small, is definitely one of the moral qualities in every person. In Ayats 23 and 24 of Surah Al-Ahzab, one of the signs of faith is adherence to covenants, the first Ayat of Surah Ma'idah says:

O believers! Honor your obligations.

Among the believers are men who have been true to their covenant with God, of them some have fulfilled their Nahbah, and some of them are still waiting, but they have never changed in the least. (Al-Ahzab, Ayat 23)

'That God may reward the truthful for their truthfulness, and punish the hypocrites, if He wills, or pardon them. God is Forgiving and Merciful' (Al-Ahzab, Ayat 24):

Believers! Honour your bonds! All grazing beasts of the flock are permitted to you except those which are recited to you hereinafter, but you are not allowed to hunt in the state of Ihram (a state of pilgrim sanctity). Indeed God decrees as He wills. (Surah Al-Ma'idah, Ayat 1)

In this study, based on the surveys conducted, it was assumed that RBs could have an effect on OC. Accordingly, RBs were

used as an independent variable and OC as a dependent one, and the research hypothesis was presented as follows.

Research hypothesis

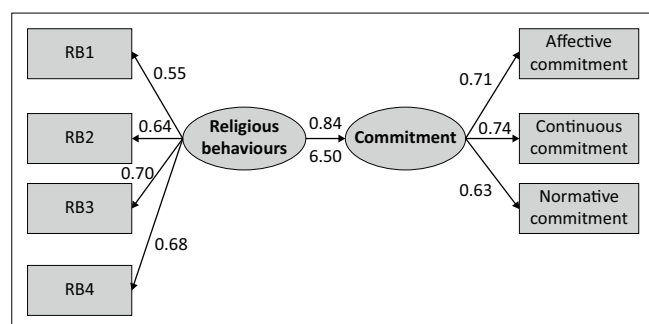
Religious behaviours will affect OC among Malaysian Muslim HCWs in 2022.

Research methods

Using an applied research design, a descriptive nonexperimental survey was recruited in this study for data collection purposes. The statistical population included 2500 HCWs from 10 hospitals in Kuala Lumpur, Georgetown and Malacca, Malaysia, selected by the simple random sampling from the Muslim staff. The data were further collected by a research tool comprised of the questionnaire developed by Allen and Meyer (1990) to measure OC and the standardised scale introduced by Glock and Stark (1965) to measure RBs, whose Cronbach's alpha coefficients were 0.84 and 0.79, using the SPSS software package, which indicated the good reliability of both questionnaires. In order to measure the validity of the questionnaires, the fit indices of the structural equation modelling (SEM) were utilised in the AMOS software package. According to the values of the two main fit indices, namely chi-square index/degree of freedom (χ^2/df) = $1.84 < 2$ and the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) = $0.081 < 0.1$, as well as the goodness-of-fit index (GFI) and the adjusted GFI (AGFI) more than 0.90, it was concluded that the designed model had a good fit and the research questionnaire had good validity. Upon the distribution of 2500 questionnaires among HCWs, 2428 cases were received in full, and the rest, which were incomplete, were excluded from analysis. Among the respondents, 64% of the HCWs were men and 36% were women. In addition, 35%, 48% and 17% of the employees had less than 10, between 10 and 20, and more than 20 years of work experience, respectively. Moreover, 78% of the HCWs were nurses and others (22%) were non-HCWs in other medical facilities.

Findings

Figure 1 depicts the SEM in this study, using the AMOS software package. According to the main research hypothesis, the relationship between RBs and OC was investigated. Given the *t*-statistic of 6.50 and the fact that the given value was greater than 1.96 at the significance level of 0.05, a significant difference was concluded between RBs and OC among the Malaysian HCWs (Table 1). In addition, the *p*-value in this relationship was equal to 0.84, which indicated a positive relationship between the research variables. Moreover, the dimensions examined in the field of RBs, that is, belief-related, emotional, ritualistic and consequential, with the *t*-statistic values of 3.245, 4.131, 5.113 and 4.825, respectively, with an error level of less than 0.05, were suitable for confirming the assumed relationships. As a result, a significant relationship was observed between such dimensions and RBs. In addition, the observed OC components had the *t*-statistic higher than 1.96 (viz. affective commitment = 3.266, continuance



RB, Religious behaviours.

FIGURE 1: Relationship between research variables.

TABLE 1: Hypothesis test.

Hypothesis	<i>P</i>	<i>T</i> -value	Result
Religious behaviours → Organisational commitment	0.84	6.50	Confirmed

commitment = 3.654 and normative commitment = 2.862) at an error level of less than 0.05, so a significant relationship was established between them.

Discussion

The main aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between RBs and OC among Malaysian Muslim HCWs in 2022. The results of the hypothesis test can be seen in Table 1 and Figure 1. The main research hypothesis here was to investigate the relationship between RBs and OC among Malaysian HCWs in 2021. Based on the study results, RBs were effective in OC with a path coefficient of 0.84. The results of examining the components of RBs also showed a significant relationship among all belief-related, emotional, ritualistic and consequential dimensions in employees and their RBs. In addition, the research findings revealed that religiosity was a good predictor of explaining OC, so all religiosity dimensions (viz. belief-related, emotional, ritualistic and consequential) could promote OC.

The need for perceiving the principle of efficiency in the use of available resources and facilities to achieve organisational goals as well as making efforts to increase them is almost obvious. Although efficiency has often been recommended in all sectors, the characteristics of the healthcare sector double the importance of this issue with regard to scarce resources and their accurate evaluation for an optimal use, in order to ensure, maintain and improve public health. In fact, the allocation of resources and their efficiency, along with attracting the effective participation of communities at all levels with full respect for justice and access to healthcare services with the desired quality is one of the primary issues in this sector. In the healthcare sector, hospitals are one of the important institutions to provide healthcare, medical and educational services, with their special facilities to help the sick people return to their physical and mental health conditions in the society, train specialists, do medical research and finally promote public health. Studies have accordingly confirmed that such centres take a major share of the resources of the healthcare sector, especially in developing

countries. Therefore, the optimal use of these resources should be the focus of attention among hospital managers and officials. In this line, HRs are the most important part and a vital factor in the survival of organisations; in other words, no organisation has a concept without HRs. Even the technological breakthroughs and the emergence of novel technologies have failed to moderate the role of HRs in the organisation. For that reason, HR management is of utmost importance. The development and success of any organisation is further tied to the satisfaction, motivation and effort of its HRs. The employee motivation and growth is thus a fundamental factor in the continuous improvement of efficiency in any organisation. The development of the organisation and its employees are not like two ends of the same scale, but they have a direct relationship with each other, so the growth of each one depends on the other. The growth and development of HRs can be achieved, but only with specialised training. Human resources development should be thus mutual. In addition to receiving the necessary training, issues related to morale, motivation and satisfaction among the workforce should be considered. The first step is to view HRs as the most important capital of the organisation, not just as a means to reach goals. One way to strengthen HRs in organisations of Islamic societies is to pay much attention to religious teachings in their administration.

Religion creates a positive attitude in a person towards the world and helps him face unfortunate events in life, such as loss or illness. Religion gives meaning to a person's life. Having meaning and purpose in life indicates mental health and increases a person's ability to do things. Religious people adapt more easily to traumatic life events that are not acceptable. Religion creates hope, and hope creates motivation and energy in a person, which makes them hope for a better life. Religious people feel more free than others. They have less emotional attachment to people around them. A sense of control in religious people is created by praying, so that praying becomes a sense of indirect control over seemingly unchangeable and unfortunate circumstances. The key role of religion in the formation of beliefs and values, and finally the behaviour of individuals in different social settings, such as Islamic organisations, is undisputable. The behaviour of people in organisations also has different dimensions, including OC as the most crucial one.

Conclusion

People's behaviour is further influenced by religions, values and worldviews. In addition, religiosity shapes one's attitudes, tendencies and actions. In light of this, confirming the relationship between RBs and OC could be an example of these assumptions. The study results accordingly showed that spirituality was related to the religious approach and beliefs as well as seeing God as the watcher of affairs, with OC, so remembering God could prevent employees from avoiding responsibility. According to the study results, the most important suggestion was to make the best use of the potential HRs for the individual excellence of the employees, and ultimately that of the organisation and the society.

Whenever managers adhere to their religious beliefs and the principles of Islamic work ethics in organisations, and the organisational culture spreads them, employees consider their work-life cycle and religious beliefs to be integrated and then take more steps towards the improvement of themselves, the organisation and the society.

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Competing interests

The authors have declared that no competing interest exists.

Authors' contributions

M.M.A. writing, S.H.A. project administration, N.K.A.D. formal analysis, S.I.S.A-H. investigation, A.T.J. methodology, I.M. formal analysis, H.P. conceptualisation, and D.S. resources.

Ethical considerations

This article followed all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human or animal subjects.

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Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

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