

Exploring the Role of Religiosity in Human Resource Management Practices: New Implications towards Ensuring Equality and Diversity in Organizations

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ABSTRACT

Achieving equality and respecting diversity in human resource management practices remain an important issue to be addressed in organizations. This paper explores the case of Lebanon, a small country, known for its religious diversity, yet faces challenges in ensuring equality. Within the context of the Middle East region, a limited amount of research explicitly discussed religiosity and its impact on hiring practices. In fact, Lebanon, witnesses a legal allocation of higher positions in governmental institutions according to people's religious affiliation. Thus, the purpose of this empirical research is to evaluate whether similar practices are also occurring in the recruitment and selection process of private organizations. Based on the social identity theory, a proposed model was analyzed by incorporating survey centered quantitative research methodology and employing structural equation modelling technique. The results have shown that most of the citizens are deeply religious, leading to evident discrimination in employment. The findings contribute to the literature by adding new evidence and knowledge about discrimination in human resource management practices and recommending strategies to ensure equal employment opportunities and more equitable and diverse work environment.

Keywords: diversity; discrimination; religiosity; recruitment; selection; equal employment opportunities.

INTRODUCTION

Religious divisions have been the main reasons behind many business and world conflicts (Canaan et al., 2022). As religion plays an essential role in determining national and cultural identities, employees often bring their religious beliefs and values into the workplace, posing a new managerial challenge that must be addressed to prevent cultural prejudice and ensure equal opportunities (Duffy, 2006). In most cases, the workplace is composed of a complex network of people coming from different backgrounds and cultures. Said et al. (2023) defined diversity as a group of employees having differences related to age, gender, religion, cultural background, education, or experience. Diversity among working groups, with its drawbacks, can be a serious issue for an organization, as this may create discrimination or favoritism among employees (Sharma, 2016, Cantone & Wiener, 2017).

In fact, discrimination based on religion is growing more rapidly than gender or race discrimination (Beyer & Beaman, 2019) and this is observed in the Middle East, where religious discrimination seems to score higher than other regions (Akbaba, 2009) and where social categorizations and divisions were embraced as a norm (Salibi, 1988). In a multiconfessional country like Lebanon, religious diversity is typically defined in terms of affiliation with any of various sectarian groups (Badaan et al., 2020). For that reason, the paper discusses the case of Lebanon, which is a small Middle Eastern country with a population of five million citizens divided into four religious groups

and eighteen officially recognized religious sects (Abboud & Al Hajj, 2023). In this country, the competition over power between those many sectarian groups led to fifteen years of disastrous civil war, which ended by agreeing on proportionally distributing the key position in the government and public institutions amongst representatives of those religious communities (Nelson, 2013; Harb, 2022). This confessional control of governmental institutions significantly shaped Lebanon's socio-political context and has since raised concerns about whether individuals' competencies and qualifications in Lebanese private organizations are being overlooked in favor of their religious identities in any human resource practice (Khalaf, 1997).

In this country, some studies focused on the relation between gender diversity and employment in organizations (Yahchouchi & Salloum 2015). Messarra (2014) examined the understanding of religious discrimination on employees' engagement, participation and commitment. Others assessed the impact of religion on general human resources practices (Al Ariss, 2010; Al Ariss & Sidani, 2016). However, until now there is no study to have assessed the relationship between religion, more specifically religious identity, practices, attachment and diversity; and employment in private institutions. To fill this gap, the aim of this study is to measure these concepts and examine whether people's religion might influence hiring decisions and employment opportunities. The major goal of this study is to investigate how deep the problem goes by asking the following research question: Does religiosity play a role in the employment process in Lebanese institutions?

The originality of the paper lies in its theoretical contributions and practical implications. Based on the social identity theory, it adds to the literature on religious diversity by including two major antecedents in the model, religious diversity and the relationship among attachment, practice, and identity, and their impact on the selection criteria and hiring process. Practically, it raises awareness and assesses the potential impact of religious discrimination on employment with the aim of generating long term solutions to create more equitable and diverse work environments.

To achieve this, the research will begin with a theoretical framework and a literature review about religious identity, practices, attachment and diversity, while relating them to the hiring process and selection criteria, in order to be able to draw the hypotheses. Then, the quantitative method will be used by distributing a questionnaire to individuals working in private institutions. And lastly, the paper will end with results discussion, conclusion, limitations, and implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Theoretical Framework

The study was grounded in the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 2004), wherein individuals define their social identities by assigning themselves and others to social groups. This theory works on social categorization, by classifying people into those that belong to their ingroup and others belonging to outgroups (Hogg, 2016). This can also be related to the embedded intergroup theory (Alderfer and Smith, 1982) that indicates that a firm is usually divided into two groups of people: identity and organizational group. The identity group includes people sharing the same demographic characteristics such as race or religion, whereas the organizational group includes people with similar jobs, responsibilities or status. These ideas and attitudes, produced by categorization, may lead to conflict and subsequently discrimination.

Religious Identity, Practices and Attachment

Nowadays, the world has never been more religious, and four out of five individuals claim to belong to a religious group (Stark, 2023). Religion may be described as a belief system that dictates values, ethics, doctrines, and manners that connect humanity with transcendence and provide people with a reason for living (Culver & Lundquist Denton, 2017). These doctrinal beliefs are shared between the members of specific communities (Jensen, 2021).

Religion can be a central part of one's identity. In their study, Case and Chavez (2017) measured religious identity and differentiated it from religious attachment and religious practices. In fact, religious identity is related to an individual's perception of themselves as a representative of a specific religious group (Leite et al., 2023). This religious identity might lead to people classifying themselves and others into differentiated groups, which might create social divisions, mainly ingroup favoritism and out-group discrimination (Krueger, 2001).

As per Marques et al. (2007), religion can have an impact on the behavior of individuals, especially the ones who have a high degree of religiosity. Religiosity is actually different from religion in the sense that it is not just a membership of a religious party. It illustrates the level at which individuals adhere to religious ideologies, frequently attend worship places, as well as participating in religious activities (Holdcroft, 2006). In their study about religiosity during adolescence, Pearce et al. (2017) explained five interrelated dimensions of religiosity: religious beliefs, religious salience, religious exclusivity, private practice, and external practice. To define some of them, religious

salience is the extent to which religion reveals someone's identity; private practice refers to personal relation with the divine and one's dedication to the faith; while external practice refers to the attendance of religious gatherings.

Consequently, religious attachment describes the depth of religious beliefs and the level of engagement with one's faith. Believers form this attachment with a higher power as they feel supported, secured, and loved (Sim & Loh, 2003). Of course, significant variability in the prayer times, worship services, and attendance frequencies exist between individuals and religions (Höllinger, & Makula, 2021). Accordingly, H1 is suggested below:

H1. *Religiously attached people put their religious beliefs into practice.*

On the other hand, religious practices are the activities performed by people as a part of their religious beliefs and commitment (Barrett & Lanman, 2008). They differ from one religion to another but most of them include commemoration of Gods, prayers, meditations, ceremonies, sacrifices, feasts, pilgrimages, matrimonial and funerary services, and many other aspects of human culture (King & Crowther, 2004). So, the more people apply to those religious conducts and rituals, the more they are revealing their religious identity. Thus, H2 is claimed below:

H2. *Religious practitioners reveal their religious identity.*

Religious Identity, Selection Criteria and Hiring Process

According to Hackett (2014), religious identity should not be equated with religious belief or practice. Things like headscarves, prayer beads, kippahs, daily routines, and speech indicate religious identity to others, even when the person may not be a religious practitioner (Douyère & Gonzalez, 2020). And these observable things might be a discriminative tool in recruitment.

In 2020, the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission received 2,404 religion-based discrimination complaints, a number that increased dramatically to 13,814 in 2022 due to COVID-19-related issues, before declining to 4,341 in 2023, which remained above pre-pandemic levels. (U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, 2023). Numerous prior studies have employed field experiments to investigate the presence of religious discrimination in hiring practices (Drydakis, 2010; Wright et al., 2013; Aidenberger et al., 2021). This article extends earlier research by deepening both the empirical analysis and theoretical exploration of religious discrimination in the workplace.

In Lebanon, there are eighteen religious sects that are combined into three main ones that are Islam, Christianity and Druze (Haddad, 2002). These religious sects are geographically separated across the country, but the capital Beirut is multi-confessional. Religion for the Lebanese people goes beyond being a mere inheritance or a choice expressed in customary worship but is rather a fundamental aspect of the culture (Khashan, 1992). According to them, their nation is identified by their religious community, which represents the people to whom they are affiliated. This group membership and the preference of members of the same sect are main features of religious identification, which is aligned with the social identity theory. They believe that abandoning one's sect equates to leaving one's entire world, resulting in being disloyal and living without the support of a community (Ghossein, 1982).

The history of Lebanon has legitimately authorized a positive discrimination in hiring Lebanese citizens in the public sector by assigning key positions according to strict quotas for religious groups (Aoun, 2007). For example, hiring only Christians Maronite for the position of President of the Republic, Muslims Sunnite for Prime Minister, and Muslims Shiite for Head of Parliament (Malley, 2018). Moreover, the seats in the parliament and other positions in public institutions are equally distributed as per religious affiliations (Maktabi, 1999). Instead of supporting each other, this power-sharing system based on religion highlighted sectarian identities and was unfortunately incapable of bonding the population under one single Lebanese identity (Salti & Chaaban, 2010). Subsequently, Lebanon remained divided along sectarian groups, and this system ingrained itself into the Lebanese culture and extended across public institutions and numerous private financial, educational, and social firms (Baytiyeh, 2017).

Al Ariss (2010) highlighted this concern and provided numerous examples of job seekers experiencing religious discrimination during the hiring process. He interviewed a varied group of people and discovered that some participants who worked in Lebanon faced challenges in securing employment due to the absence of merit-based recruitment criteria. Consequently, it becomes evident that workplace religious diversity in Lebanon adheres to the sectarian order and that religious affiliation is a crucial personal attribute influencing significant human resources management decisions, leading to the exclusion of particular religiously affiliated groups from the workplace, and the loss of a larger pool of skills (Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Therefore, H3 and H4 are proposed below:

H3. *A candidate's religious identity affects the selection criteria for a job vacancy.*

H4. *A candidate's religious identity affects the hiring process of a job vacancy.*

Religious Practices and Selection Criteria

The main purpose of recruitment is to place the right person in the right job (Barber, 1998). In order to do so, the criteria should be based on job responsibilities and objective requirements that are not discriminative. Moreover, recruiters must try to find a combination of technical and interpersonal competencies that will benefit the organization (Ulrich et al. 2010). In fact, applicants can tell whether there is discrimination by how recruiters deal with them, and this will impact on the overall image of the company (Wright et al., 2013). In diverse regions, evidence shows that explicit religiosity can significantly reduce interview callback rates. Demonstrating strong religious beliefs and practices may not be recommended, as it could potentially trigger implicit biases, negatively impacting selection decisions (Wallace et al., 2014). Hence, H5 is supposed below:

H5. Being a religious practitioner influences the selection criteria of a job vacancy.

Religious Attachment and Hiring Process

Earlier studies highlight notable hiring discrimination against applicants signaling strong religious commitment (Pierné 2013; Hallin, 2022). A study by Hoffman (2016) indicated that 79% of Christians, 87% of Muslim Shiites and 88% of Muslim Sunnites exhibit high levels of personal devotion and religious attachment. More than 97% of all religious groups stated that religion played a significant role in their lives. Regardless of background, gender, or other criteria, a survey conducted by Harb (2010) found that Lebanese youths aged 18 to 25 display a remarkably high level of religiosity.

The hiring process involves many steps, ranging from requesting the need for manpower to analyzing the job and writing the job description, looking for candidates, screening, testing, and interviewing them and finally offering them the job (Dessler, 2013). In any of these steps, if candidates disclose their religious attachment, discrimination might occur. So, H6 is considered below:

H6. Having high religious attachment influences the hiring process of a job vacancy.

Religious Diversity, Selection Criteria and Hiring Process

Religious diversity at the workplace can be managed by accepting employees' diverse religious beliefs and allowing them to express their religious views. Lately, organizations have developed new approaches to management, which are aimed at stimulating employees' minds, touching their hearts and spirits, and fostering their personal growth (Giacalone & Jurkiewicz, 2010).

These new approaches were implemented in businesses like Boeing, Intel and Coca-Cola, by creating new ways of integrating religiosity into their strategies and cultures. An example of that is being flexible in granting days off for religious holidays only to the ones celebrating. This is an effective approach for multicultural organizations to ensure that the company continues to function throughout the year. Other examples are related to dress code and appearance, food, and office displays. Some companies may accept to display any religious sign, such as veil or cross, and, to hold holy books like the Bible and Quran, and to engage into prayer groups and offer prayer rooms to employees. Moreover, other companies try to restrict eating in public during the seasons of Lent or Ramadan in order to respect the employees who are fasting and avoid causing tension among them (Burack, 1999).

According to Berry (2016), "diversity is understood to include variations in culture, ethnicity, religion, age, gender, and sexual orientation". Managing religious diversity at the workplace means applying policies and procedures that aim to involve individuals who are considered, in a way, different from the majority members of an organization (Herring, 2009). It aims to create an inclusive culture that accommodates employees' religious beliefs and expressions and respect their religious practices (Langton et al., 2013).

Consequently, H7 and H8 are assumed below:

H7. Religious diversity has a significant impact on the selection criteria of a job vacancy.

H8. Religious diversity has a significant impact on the hiring process of a job vacancy.

Selection Criteria and Hiring Process

The concept of equal employment opportunity ensures that everyone receives fair treatment without being equally treated for any reason in the whole process of recruitment and selection (Van Buren et al., 2020). This applies to discrimination based on gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, color, language, religion, political affiliation, social status, marital status, mental or physical disability, or any other basis foreseen by the law (Dobbin, 2009).

Protecting people from being discriminated is a difficult task for human resources staff, especially in certain cases where subjectivity and emotions may be involved (Loriaux, 2008). Despite measurements to prevent discrimination, such as the ones recommended by Adamovic (2020), interviewers may favor some applicants over others based on various undefined reasons. Recruiters, being individuals with their own identities, emotions, and intuitions, can be influenced when making hiring decisions (Wingate et al., 2024).

Though limited research has been conducted on human resource management practices in Lebanese private firms, all of them share the same conclusion: HRM is not considered as a strategic function (Semerdjian, 2007).

According to Cerdin et al. (2002), this is because most Lebanese companies are family businesses, where family members hold key positions, run the operation, and make decisions independently of the human resources department, which primarily functions as a personnel unit rather than a strategic one. In the hiring process, referrals and personal connections are crucial, particularly in family-owned businesses that often prioritize their closed community and support their fellow religious adherents (Fathallah et al., 2020). These practices have raised concerns about whether candidates' sect is being preferred over their qualifications and competencies during the recruitment in Lebanese private organizations. Therefore, H9 is presumed below:

H9. *The selection criteria are key factors that affect the hiring process of a job vacancy.*

There is no previous study to have addressed the concepts of religious identity, practice, attachment and diversity separately, yet correlated (Leite et al., 2023). In this research paper, these concepts will be assessed by aligning them with two concepts related to employment, which are selection criteria and hiring process.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

To formulate hypotheses and identify relevant constructs and variables, quantitative research required a thorough assessment and evaluation of the body of current literature. Therefore, it was decided that the survey-based quantitative research methodology would work well in the “positivist” context of this contemporary study. The study was developed based on the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

Survey, Sample, and Participants

This study's goal was to assess how religion affects selection criteria and hiring practices in a nation with multiple confessions. Consequently, a series of questions were framed, and a survey tool was devised for this study. To ensure that the survey is pertinent and appropriately contextualizes the current research, questionnaires were created based on the various previous studies (Wright, et al., 2013; Case & Chavez, 2017; Pearce, et al., 2017). The questions sought to measure six latent variables, namely religious identity, religious practices, religious attachment, religious diversity, selection criteria and hiring process, for the purpose of confirming or rejecting the relationship between them. On another note, the survey comprised four categorical variables related to gender, age structure, working period and religious homogeneity with the recruiter.

Questions in this survey are reflective in nature and need respondents to provide accurate, subjective interpretations of the survey topics. To make it more convenient and accessible to a wider audience, the test was administered online. Each variable was assessed using a 7-point Likert level, where a score of "1" directs “strong disagree” whereas a score of "7" directs “strongly agree”. The Likert 7-point level is shown to be susceptible to reduce interpolations, and to be appropriately compressed to enable competent responses (Leavy, 2022).

Purposive sampling is adopted in present research for data gathering. Purposeful sampling is the intended selection of informants that can elucidate a selected subject, perception, or outcome (Robinson, 2014). It allows choosing the informant candidates who were eager to share their knowledge and real time experiences. For a person to be eligible for the study, they must be Lebanese nationals who work for different private companies in diverse industries. Participants were randomly selected and notified that their data would be kept private to ensure their obscurity. The survey was anonymous, participation was voluntary, and individuals had the option to discontinue at any time. Questionnaires were distributed in July 2024 via a variety of electronic channels, including social media, WhatsApp, and emails. Google Forms was used to create survey questions. As an outcome of the survey, 485 surveys were retained, out of 505 which constitute the 96.06% response rate. 20 survey responses were found incomplete and considered unfit to include in the analysis stages. The sample population's descriptive data are displayed in Table 1. This study refurbished a series of questions in survey which framed as a survey tool for this study.

Pilot test

To evaluate the questionnaire's consistency and the validity of the suggested measure, we carried out pilot research on 35 students' randomly selected responses. The “inner consistency and dependability” of the fostered constructs / factors were examined using Cronbach's alpha assessment. The Cronbach's alpha outcomes of all the constructs / factors were observed to be more than the admissible limit of 0.7 (Van Griethuijsen et al., 2015; Taber, 2018), indicating their reliability. Table 2 demonstrates pilot test results and confirms the reliability of the proposed scale items.

Multivariate Research Approach

After determining the survey, scale, sampling, and pilot steps, the final step of this research method in this study was to carry out multivariate research analysis using “structural equation modelling” (SEM) technique and AMOS software was utilized to perform measurement and structural model fit analysis. SEM is an important statistical technique for measuring the theories and connections between latent variables and explicit constructs of the observed model (Hair et al., 2010). The SEM using AMOS is applied to collected data to investigate the hypotheses that have been put forth. Combining multiple regression and component analysis, SEM brings forth statistical results for overall model fit, also it permits calculation of all possible correlations between observable and latent variables simultaneously (Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). SEM statistical testing, which is regarded nowadays as a “second-generation procedure” for research surveys analysis, and broadly being used to examine the survey data (Patil et al., 2020). The first part of the SEM process was the “measurement model” which was evaluated using confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), and the “structural model” was the later step which was assessed using factors’ path(s) analysis. Furthermore, Cronbach's alpha (α_c), convergent, and discriminant validity evaluations show the validity and reliability of the intended scale and their identified constructs (Kline, 2023).

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Researchers use a variety of statistical tools to formulate and validate their findings. Factor analysis and regression analysis were extensively used and common in the first generation. The second generation of research has seen a vivid movement in the field of study headed for more complex multivariate practices such as SEM during the late nineteen nineties (Goggins and Xing, 2016). The first measurement model and second structural model were the key analysis phases applied to evaluate the hypothesized model as part of SEM.

Results from Measurement Model Fit Analysis

The measurement model was evaluated in the current study, and the suggested scale's validity and reliability were then established. To confirm its internal consistency, reliability and validity of the measurement model were examined. The underlying factors analysis was carried out using CFA method which contributes to the validity of the proposed scale (Paswan, 2009). We mainly analyzed the “measurement model fit indices” using CFA shown in Table 3 and thus proposed measurement scale's validity was confirmed using CFA and later proposed scale's items were updated after eliminating unloaded items to their respective factors. Three various rounds of CFA were carried out to validate the measurement model as model fit. As a result, the “measurement model fit indices” met the standard estimates specified in Tables 3 and 4. Following several iterations of CFA to attain measurement model fit and improving our suggested model, the incorporated scale's items corresponding each factor / construct were successfully loaded, yielding a reasonable factor loading with adequate score of more than 0.50 (Hair et al., 2010). All the detected items' associated constructs / factors were effectively loaded with more than >0.50 factor score.

Obtained values from various rounds of the measurement model, pertinent results (Chi-square=1.446, GFI=0.949, AGFI=0.933, RMSEA=.031, RMR=0.019, CFI=0.987, TLI=0.984, RFI=0.951, IFI=0.987) matched the adequate level as mentioned in Table 3 and proved “goodness-of-fit” of intended model. However, after performing measurement model fitting, items RA4 and RD3 were dropped from the scale as their factor loadings were below the acceptable range (<0.5).

“Validity and reliability” of the constructs / factors were evaluated through a range of techniques. Greater than 0.70 was the suggested acceptable threshold for Cronbach's alpha and obtained results reached from 0.729 to 0.899. Achieved standardized regression weight (SRW) of the constructs varied from 0.519 to 0.922 (threshold ≥ 0.5) and to evaluate convergent validity, SRW was employed. For squared multiple correlation (SMC), a value of ≥ 0.30 is recommended. Such correlation demonstrates interdependence of the components included in the factor determination. The SMC test yielded results between 0.303 and 0.852 in the range. Lastly, composite reliability (CR) and average variance extracted (AVE) should have values $> (0.7$ and $0.50)$ (Hair et al., 2010). Table 4 shows the CR and AVE values which were observed well within the given ranges. Further, Table 4 demonstrates how the obtained results surpassed the convergent validity criterion.

Finally, the assessment of discriminant validity of anticipated model was important to further confirm the measurement model fit. Discriminant validity was ascertained when the measurement model fit was further validated. Table 5 shows the results and confirms the discriminant validity. Sloping values in Table 5 are more than its remaining column values, which clearly explains how discriminant validity was attained.

Results from Structural Model Fit Analysis

After measuring the measurement model fit's validity and reliability for the suggested scale, the next stage was to apply "structural model fit indices" to assess the hypothesized links between the proposed components. With the aim to evaluate the likelihood of conceptualized model and the importance of the interactions between the constructs, we performed a "structural model fit" estimation. SEM has established a method for figuring out how latent variables are correlated, and path analysis using AMOS visualizations verified the associations amongst constructs that were theorized (Hair et al., 2010). The evaluation results of the structural model fit are shown in Table 6. The values of critical-ratio or (t-value ≥ 1.960), path coefficient value (β), and p-values ($\leq 0.001^{***}$; $\leq 0.01^{**}$; $< 0.05^*$) were calculated in this structural model fit evaluation as per Hair et al., (2010). Intended, verified model, which reveals all accepted and rejected hypothesized linkages, is shown in Figure 2. Eight hypotheses out of nine were clearly proven by the regression results, and proposed constructs /factors are positively correlated which show positive impact on HP. Due to insignificant p-values of 0.827 and 0.350, the hypothesized associations between RP and SC and RA and HP were rejected. Path coefficients between these two constructs were found negative (- 0.03 and - 0.15) which further supports the rejection of these two hypotheses.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion and Conclusion

The increasing number of scholarly writings about religion and management indicates that the relationship between them is rising and better understood (Linando, 2022). Empirical research also demonstrates the positive effects of religion on the workplace, in terms of employee job satisfaction, motivation, success, comfort, moral conduct and career flexibility (Henderson, 2014; Dumas & Sanchez-Burks, 2015; Musa, 2017). According to Alewell & Rastetter (2020) growing significance of religion in many management and legal fields, particularly in relation to international conflicts, refugee integration, social unrest, and the religious diversity of workforces and clients in global organizations is observed. It is widely expected that religion and religiosity are becoming extremely significant in businesses for both employees and employers. Their theoretical and conceptual relevance for human resource management is discussed persuasively in literature. The present study is in line with preceding discussion and attempts to identify the role of religious diversity in human resource management practices with a special focus on Lebanon. The research rendered in this study considered Lebanon, which is one of the multi-confessional nations where people view religion as a crucial component of their cultural identity. Top positions in the public sector are given to candidates according to their religion. Therefore, this paper's goal was to determine whether this also occurs in private firms.

Since religion is an essential factor in management practices, our present study identified it as a key factor and classified it into four various aspects namely "religious identity, religious attachment, religious practices, and religious diversity" and its impact on job "selection criteria and hiring process" was studied. Thorough review of literature results in the conceptualization of nine notable hypotheses and seven hypothesized relationships confirmed the positive presence in the exhibited model of this contemporary research. Below is the discussion about the hypotheses which demonstrated seven positive relationships, and two negative ones.

Hypothesis (H1) with path (RA \rightarrow RP) confirmed the positive relationship amongst religious attachment and religious practices. Which means religiously attached people place their religious beliefs into practices. The affectional bond that people create with their religious figures is called religious attachment. It is the degree to which individuals dedicate themselves and adhere to religious rituals (Holdcroft, 2006). The structural model proves the preceding relationship with threshold values ($\beta = 0.54$, $t = 5.214$, p^{***} value). Attachment theory examines the emergence and evolution of affectionate relationships between people. It also offers a framework for comprehending the fundamental aspect of religion and elaborate a person's relationship with God (Cherniak et al., 2021). Which means such religious attachment extends the person's motivation to exercise it by performing religious practices. These arguments extend the confirmation of our findings and confirm the positive relationship between RA and RP.

Hypothesis (H2) with path (RP \rightarrow RI) confirmed their hypothesized relationships as positive with the threshold ($\beta = 0.81$, $t = 6.505$, p^{***}), which means hypothesized relationship among religious practices influence the religious identity. In fact, when people perform religious practices, they are also revealing their religious identity and beliefs. A recent study by Leite et al., (2023) confirmed the positive correlations among religious identity, religious practice, and religious belief. Religion and religious identity taken together make up the way of life that is associated with the consecrated. Werbner (2009) identified religious identity as a matter of discourse on borders, affiliation, and distinctiveness while also being encompassed and inclusive. He also mentioned that some studies

confirmed the relationship between RI and RP, therefore our study is in line with previous studies and confirmed this relationship as positive.

Hypothesis (H3) with path (RI → SC) and hypothesis (H4) with path (RI → HP) proved their hypothesized relationships as positive with ($\beta = 0.46$, $t = 2.946$, p^{***}) and ($\beta = 0.50$, $t = 2.120$, $p = .001$) values. These findings provide a convincing explanation for the influence of religious identity on selection criteria as well as religious identity on hiring process in private Lebanese organizations. This suggests that the religious identity of people is taken into consideration when they apply for any job and influences the job selection criteria and hiring process. It was observed in the multi-confessional country, Lebanon and was confirmed by various previous studies that employed field experiments in other countries (Drydak, 2010; Wright et al., 2013; Aidenberger et al., 2021).

Hypothesis (H5) with path (RP → SC) and hypothesis (H6) with path (RA → HP) were rejected as their hypothesized relationships due to the negative benchmark values ($\beta = -.03$, $t = -.218$, $p = .827$ value) and ($\beta = -.15$, $t = -.935$, $p = .350$ value). These findings provide a convincing explanation for the non-influence of religious practices of any person on selection criteria as well as religious attachment of any person on the hiring process in private organizations. However, previous hypotheses H3 and H4 have shown the positive influence of RI on SC and HP. This clearly suggests that whether people are attached to their religion or practice it, it doesn't directly influence the SC and HP. This is because recruiters cannot recognize the level of religious attachment of candidates and cannot tell if they are practicing their religious beliefs solely from the recruitment and selection process. What they can identify is applicants' religious identity which seems to be impacted by religious attachment and religious practices as per H1 and H2. As per Al Ariss and Sidani (2016), organizations in Lebanon should create a work culture that respects and includes people from all religious backgrounds and practices.

Hypothesis (H7) with path (RD → SC) and hypothesis (H8) with path (RD → HP) were positively accepted as their hypothesized relationships were found to be well within the benchmark values ($\beta = .67$, $t = 5.213$, p^{***} value) and ($\beta = .43$, $t = 4.543$, $p = .010$ value). These outcomes support a substantial description of the positive effect of religious diversity on the selection criteria and hiring process. It is contemplated as a good indication regarding multi-confessional countries where religious diversity is highly sought to maintain the social equilibrium as well as religious harmony within the country. The idea of diversity has been evolving. One of the first steps in fostering diversity in the workplace should be recognizing various components such as age, gender, qualifications, education, experience, in addition to religion (Linando, 2022). Understanding the preferences and sensitivities of religious ideology is one approach to fostering religious diversity at work, which can be highlighted in the selection criteria and hiring process. Additionally, the findings of these two hypotheses show that the hiring and selection procedures are in favor of their religion. This outcome in the Lebanese private sector supports the study of Reslan (2023) about the influence of confessional variety in the Lebanese public sector.

Hypothesis (H9) with path (SC → HP) confirmed the positive hypothesized relationship with the acceptable threshold values ($\beta = 0.61$, $t = 2.601$, p^{***} value) amongst the selection criteria with hiring process. While the main objective of setting the selection criteria is to select the best fit applicant to the vacant job, it is vital to design a standard and transparent hiring process that will lead to having a pool of competent applicants (Rozario et al., 2019). However, the SC is endogenous factor which is primarily influenced by the preceding conceptualized factors RA, RP, RI, and RD. At the same time HP is also an endogenous variable which received the effect of its preceding factors.

Based on the existing research, theoretical framework, and survey results, religion plays a significant role in people's lives and affects their viewpoint on several facets of life, with work being one of them. Therefore, considering immigration and globalization, which results in the hiring and integration of multinational workforces both locally and globally, promoting religious diversity is becoming increasingly important in ensuring fairer opportunities at the workplace (Turner, 2007).

Moreover, from the case of Lebanon, it is evident that religious diversity in multi-confessional countries affects the selection criteria and hiring process of employees. These results confirmed that the framework of confessionalism and consociationalism instituted in the public sector of Lebanon also implicitly extends to the private one and justified the structure of privately-owned businesses which exclusively hire members of one confessional group. This explains that the strong attachment of Lebanese people to their religious beliefs, rooted in their culture, indicates that work-related decisions may be religiously biased. This also indicates that private institutions do not offer equal employment opportunities based on merit.

The findings contribute to the literature in adding knowledge about human resource management practices and recommending strategies to avoid discrimination and ensure fair treatment.

Managerial Implications

The main concept of equal employment opportunity is to guarantee that everyone is treated fairly and that nobody faces discrimination during any human resource management practice, in accordance with national laws and regulations (Dobbin, 2009). Additionally, while calculating the costs of filling a vacant position, which are

estimated to be two to three times an employee's annual salary, employing the wrong person can be detrimental. Besides, the main negative long-term implications of bad hiring decisions are poor performance and lower organizational morale, and this might sometimes damage the reputation of the company (Dessler, 2013). Therefore, to maintain and enhance organizational effectiveness and efficiency, hiring the right candidate in the right job is a must. This is only applicable by implementing a standard recruitment process and selecting objective criteria to hire people based on merit only (Roberts, 1997).

Consequently, it is important that managers recognize religious diversity while appreciating and acknowledging the individual talents of their workforce. According to Morrison (1996) companies which handle diversity effectively will have high productivity and retention numbers and have the capacity to recruit the best talented candidates. By doing so, potential human capital will be retained in the country instead of pursuing more equitable, merit-based employment opportunities abroad, and more diverse work environments will be created.

Therefore, in a place where religious diversity is becoming a challenge for institutions, it is advised that higher management creates policies and procedures related to religious discrimination and communicate them clearly to all members in the organization as an essential part of their business values (Mathis et al., 2015). They should develop strategies and advance their management interventions to decrease the unfavorable effects of religious discrimination at work and enhance human resource management practices. To prevent religious discrimination against job applicants, they must be evaluated based on their skills and potential. Religious diversity training, coaching and mentoring can increase employees' awareness of those negative consequences, it can assist in changing behavior in general, and create an environment that promotes diversity and equality (Haddad, 2019). Continuous and tailored training programs were proven to be successful in changing employees' views of discrimination and increasing performance (Hanover & Cellar, 1998, Raad & Easa, 2020). Human resources professionals should keep on encouraging religious diversity in the workplace and avoid discrimination of any type and foster a culture of inclusion, equality and diversity among employees. Embracing religious diversity in the workplace can foster intellectual growth and social exchange, improve the work environment, and enhance organizational performance (Borstorff, 2011).

In the context of Lebanon, governmental positions must be redistributed based on merit and not on religious quota. Moreover, since the two articles related to employment discrimination in the Constitution of Lebanon are not actually applicable, they should be developed further, and legal sanctions must be imposed on any citizen who is not respecting them. In addition, religious diversity awareness programs must be presented in schools and universities to emphasize the importance of this diversity to the youths at an early stage. At the organizational level, human resource staff should understand the benefits of having progressive levels of religious diversity in the workplace and its effects on employees' performance, satisfaction, and motivation. Besides, they should take proactive measures to foster a friendly and inclusive culture, where employees respect each other, regardless of their religion.

Other nations can learn from Lebanon's case, hoping to provide people with decent work (SDG 8) and reduce inequalities among them (SDG 10).

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

A possible limitation is that the survey assessed the topic from the employees' point of view. Consequently, future research may consider interviews with recruiters, managers or owners in order to ask them about the recruitment process and the selection criteria applied in their companies and see how they perceive religious diversity at the workplace.

Moreover, the study was built on the Lebanese culture that segregates religion. To determine whether findings may vary across diverse cultural settings, further research can be conducted in other larger multi-confessional countries. Also, future studies may examine whether religion impacts individual and organizational performance. They can assess if fostering a diverse religious culture enhances organizational productivity, or if it is more advantageous to have a predominantly homogeneous religious composition among employees of the same company.

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Conflict of Interest Statement:

The authors whose names are listed above certify that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest or non-financial interest in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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FIGURES AND TABLES

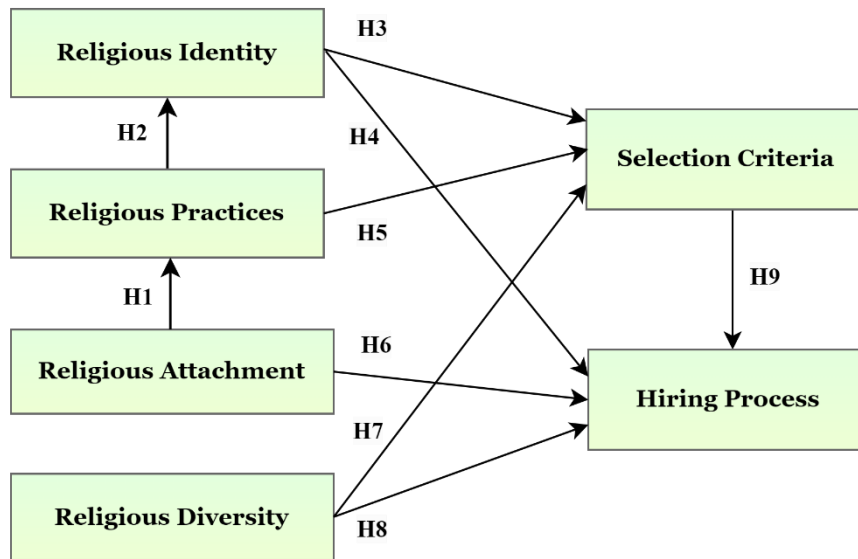


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

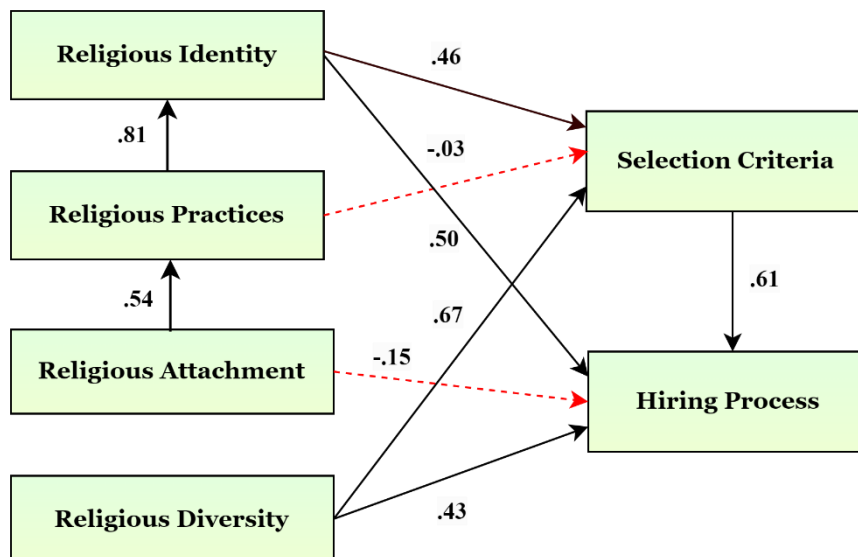


Figure 2. Path analysis for structural model fit.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of sample population.

Age	18-25: 59 (12.16%)	26-35: 298 (61.44%)	36-45: 105 (21.64%)	46-55: 23 (4.76%)	
Number of years Worked / Working	<2 years: 137 (28.24%)	2-5 years: 180 (37.11%)	6-10 years: 105 (21.64%)	11 years: 63 (13.01 %)	
Recruiter's Religion and Your Religion	Yes: 272 (56.09%)	No: 213 (43.91%)			
Gender	Female: 196 (40.41%)	Male: 289 (59.59%)			

Table 2. Pilot test results with 35 responses.

Factor with items	Cronbach's Alpha (α_c)
Religious Identify (RI)	RI1, RI2, RI3, RI4, RI5 .881
Religious Practices (RP)	RP1, RP2, RP3, RP4 .883
Religious Attachment (RA)	RA1, RA2, RA3, RA4 .803
Religious Diversity (RD)	RD1, RD2, RD3, RD4, RD5 .918
Selection Criteria (SC)	SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4 .872
Hiring Process (HP)	HP1, HP2, HP3 .748

Table 3. Measurement model fitting results.

Model Fit Indices	Obtained Values & Threshold
Chi-square	1.446 < 3
GFI	0.949 \geq 0.9
AGFI	0.933 \geq 0.85
RMR	0.019 < 0.05
CFI	0.987 \geq 0.85
TLI	0.984 \geq 0.85
NFI	0.951 \geq 0.85
IFI	0.987 \geq 0.85
RFI	0.951 \geq 0.85
RMSEA	0.031 < 0.08
Arbuckle, (2005); Bagozzi & Yi, (2012); Holmes-Smith, P. (2011)	

Table 4. Constructs' reliability and validity tests results.

Factors	Items	SRW	SMC	CR	α_c	AVE
RI	RI1	.797	.635	0.840	0.831	0.516
	RI2	.834	.695			
	RI3	.667	.445			
	RI4	.550	.303			
	RI5	.519	.368			
RP	RP1	.616	.379	0.865	0.846	0.624
	RP2	.955	.811			
	RP3	.545	.297			
	RP4	.889	.790			
RA	RA1	.695	.484	0.849	0.793	0.655
	RA2	.819	.670			
	RA3	.900	.810			
	RA4	Dropped	Dropped			
RD	RD1	.657	.432	0.893	0.899	0.686
	RD2	.963	.828			
	RD3	Dropped	Dropped			
	RD4	.621	.386			
	RD5	.998	.852			
SC	SC1	.640	.410	0.877	0.870	0.646

	SC2	.910	.829			
	SC3	.704	.495			
	SC4	.922	.850			
HP	HP1	.657	.431	0.800	0.729	0.571
	HP2	.712	.507			
	HP3	.696	.485			

Table 5. Discriminant validity tests results.

	SC	RD	RA	RP	HP	RI
SC	0.804					
RD	0.052	0.828				
RA	0.047	0.033	0.809			
RP	0.006	0.034	0.052	0.790		
HP	0.079	0.032	0.033	0.016	0.756	
RI	0.045	0.025	0.051	0.119	0.007	0.719

Table 6. Path analysis results.

Table 6. Path analysis results.

Constructs Relationship			Hypothesis	S.E.	C.R. t-value	β	p-value	Result
RA	→	RP	H1	.091	5.214	.54	***	Accept
RP	→	RI	H2	.058	6.505	.81	***	Accept
RI	→	SC	H3	.151	2.946	.46	***	Accept
RI	→	HP	H4	.136	2.120	.50	.001	Accept
RP	→	SC	H5	.066	-.218	-.03	.827	Reject
RA	→	HP	H6	.067	-.935	-.15	.350	Reject
RD	→	SC	H7	.111	5.213	.67	***	Accept
RD	→	HP	H8	.174	4.543	.43	.010	Accept
SC	→	HP	H9	.335	2.601	.61	***	Accept