


# Inter-Religious Social Prejudice among Indonesian Muslim Students

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## Abstract

Indonesia is a nation marked by extensive diversity encompassing a myriad of languages, ethnicities, and religious affiliations. While some studies support the positive implications associated with this diversity, others argue that it harbors the potential for social discord, particularly within distinct religious communities. This research aims to scrutinize the dynamics of mature religious sentiment and Islamic knowledge concerning Muslim-Christian relations, specifically exploring their impact on social prejudice among Muslim students, who constitute the majority and hold prejudicial views towards Christians. The investigation was conducted among Muslim students aged 18-22 in Yogyakarta, Indonesia (N = 254). Employing the structural equation model (SEM) technique for analysis, the findings reveal that mature religious sentiment exerts a direct influence on social prejudice, both independently and mediated through the agreeableness trait. Additionally, Islamic knowledge pertaining to the Muslim-Christian relationship directly influences social prejudice without the intermediary of agreeableness.

**Keywords:** *Agreeableness; Islamic Knowledge; Muslim-Christian Relationship; Muslim Student; Religious Sentiment; Social Prejudice*

## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia, recognized as the largest Muslim nation globally, is renowned for its extensive diversity, characterized by a multitude of languages, ethnicities, and religions. According to Indonesia Statistics (2010), the country boasts 1211 languages, 1340 ethnicities, and acknowledges six distinct religions: Islam, Christian Protestant, Christian Catholic, Hindu, Buddha, and Confucianism. With a population of 237 million, Muslims constitute the largest community, comprising 87.18%, followed by Christian Protestants at 6.96%, Christian Catholics at 2.91%, Hindus at 1.69%, Buddhists at 0.72%, and Confucianists at 0.05%. However, the rich cultural diversity within Indonesia also brings about potential challenges, as highlighted by scholars such as Koyuncu and Denise Chipindu (2020) and Pilarska (2016). They emphasize that this diversity may contribute to heightened levels of conflict within the nation.

Diversity in religious beliefs within a community carries the inherent potential for social conflicts, primarily because religious identity is often considered non-negotiable. The clashes between identity groups based on their respective religions have been associated with an escalation in violence, as noted by Kong and Woods (2016) and Reynal-Querol (2002). Such conflicts, particularly those rooted in religious issues, have far-reaching repercussions, extending into cultural, political, and economic realms (Regus, 2020).

Indonesia, as a case in point, continues to grapple with conflicts stemming from religious issues (Regus, 2020), a matter that has gained considerable attention among academic scholars (Barron et al., 2016). The academic discourse on religious intolerance has seen various studies seeking to provide scientific insights into this phenomenon.

One notable contribution is the research conducted by Greaves, Rasheed, D'Souza, Shackleton, Oldfield, Sibley, Milne, and Bulbulia (2020), who investigated the perceived intolerance towards Christians, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jews, and Atheists in New Zealand. Their findings revealed that Muslims, in particular, faced a significantly higher perception of threat and negativity compared to adherents of other religions. Additionally, gender roles were identified as influencing intolerance attitudes, with men exhibiting a greater tendency towards intolerance than women (Greaves et al., 2020). Further insights into the relationship between religious fundamentalism and prejudice were explored by Sadowski and Bohner (2016) in a study involving Arab-Muslim respondents. The results indicated a connection between religious fundamentalism and prejudice against Americans and Europeans. Previous research has consistently indicated that minority religious groups are more vulnerable to intolerance compared to their counterparts from other religious affiliations.

Promoting tolerance within religious communities is crucial for fostering harmonious coexistence (Muhid, 2020; Suradi et al., 2020). Prejudice often targets individuals in four main categories: moral, ethnic/racial, religious, and convictional outgroups (Clobert et al., 2017). Sherwood's (2020) findings indicate that religious intolerance plays a more significant role in social prejudice than race. Understanding and tolerance toward diverse religious perspectives are pivotal for averting intergroup conflict and facilitating peaceful coexistence (van Doorn, 2014). Inter-religious tolerance, emphasizing mutual respect for differing views, values, and behaviors, is essential, with freedom representing a fundamental component, allowing individuals the autonomy to practice their faith and shape their destinies (Bukhori, 2017).

Islamic teachings, rooted in the Qur'an, advocate for harmony and tolerance, aiming to mitigate social prejudice (Rassool, 2021). However, despite the emphasis on tolerance within religious teachings, studies, such as van der Toorn et al.'s (2017), have found that religious individuals may exhibit negative prejudices compared to their nonreligious counterparts. This has led to a focus on understanding how the Muslim community, particularly Muslim students, expresses prejudice, considering factors like mature religious sentiment, Islamic knowledge about Muslim and Nonmuslim relationship, and the agreeableness trait (Nashori & Nurjannah, 2015). Intriguingly, intrinsic religiosity significantly influences both social prejudice (Sofia & Sadida, 2021) and racial prejudice (Park, 2021). Additionally, religiosity impacts the agreeableness trait (Yamagata & Takahashi, 2020), while personality traits, especially agreeableness, influence social prejudice (Brandt & Crawford, 2019; Nashori, 2023; Graziano et al., 2007; Koehn et al., 2019).

Previous research has delved into social prejudice between Islam and Christian communities (Kusumowardhani et al., 2013; Nashori & Nurjannah, 2015), social prejudice against Islamophobia (Greaves et al., 2020; Kunst et al., 2016), social prejudice against Chinese ethnicity (Bukhori, 2017; Kwok, 2021), and social prejudice against Americans and Europeans (Sadowski & Bohner, 2016). Other research also focused on races (Simon et al., 2019), people with mental disorders (Mannarini & Rossi, 2019), individuals with obesity (Vartanian et al., 2016), homosexuals (Pereira et al, 2016), homosexuals and opposition to same-sex marriage (van der Toorn et al, 2017; Pereira et al, 2016; Kwok, 2021), socioeconomic status (Manstead, 2018), and immigrant (Esses, 2021).

This study uniquely focuses on interreligious social prejudice between Muslims and Christians, taking into account the potential

conflict dynamics outlined by conflict theory, wherein the majority often dominates minority groups, leading to significant social prejudice (Sugianto & Hidayat, 2021). An exemplification of the domination of the majority over minority groups is evident in the prevalence of pronounced social prejudice. Kusumowardhani, et al. (2013) conducted research revealing that a considerable portion of students at a state Islamic university, specifically 89 out of 330 samples (27%), exhibited elevated levels of social prejudice. This alarming statistic underscores the potential for inter-religious tensions in Indonesia, particularly between the Christian and Muslim communities (Regus, 2020). The high incidence of social prejudice among students emphasizes the urgency of addressing this issue to foster greater understanding, tolerance, and harmony between religious groups in the country.

Notably, the study targets Muslim students in higher education, as research suggests that higher education may correlate with lower prejudices (Greaves et al., 2020). However, conflicting findings by Abdallah (2021) indicate that intolerance spans various societal levels, including students, with around 30.16% of Indonesian students exhibiting low tolerance attitudes. This poses a significant threat, particularly as students, predominantly from Generation Z, constitute the future generation of the nation in 2045 (Al Hakim & Juandry, 2022).

Moreover, a study conducted by the National Counter Terrorism Agency (Badan Nasional Penanggulangan Bencana/BNPT) highlights that Generation Z is identified as a group susceptible to exposure to exclusive religious beliefs, rendering them prone to harboring prejudices against other religions (Hutasoit, 2022). This vulnerability is intricately linked to the distinctive characteristics attributed to Generation Z, as outlined by David Stillman (Adityara & Rakhman, 2019). First, Generation Z is characterized by a pronounced do-it-

yourself nature, reflecting a penchant for independently acquiring knowledge. Second, they exhibit hyper-customization, involving an excessive adjustment of self-identity to gain recognition. Third, a competitive nature prevails among them, underpinned by a belief in the dichotomy of winners and losers. Fourth, the Fear of Missing Out (FOMO) is a prevalent trait, reflecting a fear of being uninformed. These four characteristics collectively pose the potential to steer Generation Z in a negative direction concerning exclusivism and religious intolerance (Sukmayadi et al., 2023). The acknowledgment of these traits underscores the importance of targeted efforts to foster tolerance, understanding, and inclusivity among Generation Z to mitigate the risk of negative impacts on interreligious relations.

### **Islam and Christian in Abrahamic Religion**

Islam fundamentally upholds the principle of freedom of religion, affirming the right of every individual to choose their belief system (ADF International, 2019). The Quran explicitly underscores the importance of religious freedom by stating that there is no compulsion in choosing a religion (Quran 10: 99), and emphasizes that God does not coerce people into believing (Quran 2: 256). Furthermore, Islam places a strong emphasis on tolerance, particularly towards Christians, recognizing them as part of the "people of the book" (al-ahl al-kitab). Islam, Christianity, and Judaism share a common foundation in the teachings of Abraham and possess holy scriptures from God (Allah) (Boyd, 2019). Consequently, Muslims are enjoined to engage positively with the people of the book (ahl kitab), especially Christians (Quran 29:46). Both Islam and Christianity are branches of the Abrahamic religion, sharing a commitment to the values of peace (Boyd, 2019; Grigoropoulou, 2020). These religions, rooted in the belief in prophets as intermediaries between God and humanity, view these chosen individuals as conduits for divine guidance and instructions to humankind. However, contemporary

issues have occasionally strained relations between Muslims and Indonesian Christians. The matter of Christianization in Indonesia has been a source of concern for Indonesian Muslims, particularly in Muslim-majority areas. This issue, dating back to the Dutch colonial period, marks a challenging phase in the relationship between Muslims and Christians that persists to the present day.

### **Social prejudice theory**

Allport (1954) are credited as pioneers in the study of social prejudice, defining it as a dislike rooted in false and rigid generalizations. Subsequently, Crandall and Eshleman (2003) characterized social prejudice as a bias that devalues individuals based on their perceived membership in a social group. Studies on individual social prejudice typically focus on negativity directed towards other groups or their members. Social prejudice, the interaction between an individual's psychology to others, is a multifaceted concept encompassing three dimensions: cognitive, affective, and conative (Hogg & Vaughan, 2014; Kite & Whitley, 2016). Myers (2013) expanded on these dimensions, elucidating that social prejudice involves beliefs, feelings, and inclinations to act. Beliefs are linked to stereotypes, representing notions about the personal qualities associated with specific groups or social categories. Stereotypes can be detrimental when individuals ignore evidence of reality and generalize to all group members. In the context of social prejudice, this belief implies neglecting evidence of the positive qualities of Christians and instead generalizing negative behaviors. The feelings component involves experiencing negative emotions towards the object of social prejudice. Scholars like Verkuyten et al. (2020) and Nashori (2017) note that prejudiced individuals may harbor feelings of dislike, discomfort, antipathy, or even hatred towards the targeted individuals or groups. The inclinations to act aspect refers to a predisposition to discriminate against other group members, with

discrimination being the acceptance or rejection of individuals based on their group membership. Numerous factors contribute to the formation of social prejudice, including cultural and political influences (Sarigili, 2018; Stewart, 2018), religious fundamentalism (Hill et al., 2010), religious ambivalence (Perry et al., 2015), psychosocial values, and social dominance orientation (Fernandes et al., 2007), personality traits (Koehn et al., 2019), and religiosity (Kollar & Fleischmann, 2022). These factors collectively shape the social infrastructure within which prejudice emerges and evolves.

### **Rationale of the Current Study**

The factors influencing social prejudice include the agreeableness trait (Koehn et al., 2019) and religiosity (Sofia & Sadida, 2021). Religiosity, in this context, is further divided into two variables: mature religious sentiment and Islamic knowledge about the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. The agreeableness trait is a component of an individual's motivational system, arising from a self-regulation process aimed at fostering intimacy, unity, and solidarity with others. The agreeableness trait manifests in distinctive behaviors that significantly impact interpersonal relationships, including caring, hospitality, generosity, simplicity, trustworthiness, and openness in expression. This trait is further delineated into six aspects: tender-mindedness, modesty, compliance, altruism, straightforwardness, and trust (Costa Jr & McCrae, 1997). Both the agreeableness trait and religiosity contribute to the complex interplay of factors shaping social prejudice.

Religiosity's impact on social prejudice is further emphasized in the work of Nashori (2023), aligning with a substantial body of research literature exploring the relationship between religiousness and prejudice (Kollar & Fleischmann, 2022). Religiosity is assessed through the constructs of mature religious sentiment, which encapsulates ethical behaviors, and Islamic knowledge about the



relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. Individual maturity in religious matters takes the form of mature religious sentiment, defined as religious feelings shaped through personal experiences. Sentiment, in this context, is a system of willingness directed and organized around specific values associated with religious objects. These experiences establish patterns of response to religious objects, encompassing certain concepts, principles, and habits (Allport, 1954). Individuals with mature religious sentiment demonstrate openness to various facts and values, providing direction to both theoretical and practical aspects of life. This sentiment is characterized by five key aspects: differentiation, dynamic character, moral consistency, comprehensiveness and integrativeness, and heuristic (Wulff, 1991). The intricate interplay between religiosity, as reflected in mature religious sentiment, and social prejudice underscores the nuanced nature of these relationships.

Islamic knowledge refers to information about the contents of Islamic teachings. Knowledge, in general, is defined as information that has been organized in memory and is part of a structured information system (Solso et al., 2008). In the context of Islam, this knowledge can be understood as the information stored in an individual's memory related to Islamic teachings, specifically concerning how the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims is supposed to be (Nashori & Nurjannah, 2015). The guidelines on how a Muslim should interact with believers of other religions (non-Muslims) are also regulated in Islamic jurisprudence (fiqh), based on the Qur'an and hadith. These regulations encompass various aspects such as ideology and ritual, interaction and interpersonal relationships, consumption and business, marriage and heritage, and leadership (Sabiq, 2016).

Previous research conducted on Papua and Ambon ethnicities, two provinces in eastern Indonesia where Muslims constitute the

minority and Christians the majority, demonstrated that the impact of Islamic knowledge and mature religious sentiment on social prejudice, with agreeableness as a mediator, was consistent with the data (Nashori & Nurjannah, 2015). In contrast to these earlier studies, the present research introduces a novel perspective by focusing on Muslim students, who represent the majority. The study is conducted in the Special Region of Yogyakarta and Java Island, where Islam is the predominant religion among the population. This unique context adds a distinctive dimension to the exploration of the relationship between Islamic knowledge, mature religious sentiment, and social prejudice.

### **Objective**

The objective of this study is to investigate whether the previously observed patterns in communities where Muslims are in the minority also manifest in communities where Muslim students constitute the majority.

## **METHOD**

### **Participant**

The participants in this study were Muslim students enrolled in undergraduate programs at Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Indonesia. The research employed a stratified cluster random sampling technique, which combines elements of both cluster random sampling and stratified random sampling. The study was specifically conducted within the Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University in Yogyakarta, comprising eight faculties grouped into two categories: faculties with religious affiliations (Faculty of Da'wah and Communication, Faculty of Adab and Culture, Faculty of Usuluddin and Islamic Thought, Faculty of Sharia and Law, Faculty of Tarbiyah and Education) and faculties without religious affiliations (Faculty of

Social Sciences and Humanities, Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, Faculty of Science and Technology). The cluster random sampling involved selecting two faculties from both the religion-related and non-religion-related groups, and subsequently, two study programs were chosen from the four selected faculties, resulting in a total of eight study programs. Simultaneously, stratified random sampling was implemented by selecting students from various academic years, including first-year, second-year, third-year, and fourth-year students. The data collection encompassed participants from eight undergraduate programs across the eight faculties within the university. This comprehensive approach ensures a diverse representation of Muslim students in different academic stages and fields of study. The study included a total of 254 participants, comprising 128 female students (50.39%) and 126 male students (49.61%) ( $M_{\text{age}} = 19,38$  years,  $SD = 1,26$  years). The determination of the sample size, guided by structural equation modeling (SEM), considered a threshold of over 200 participants, which is classified as a large sample size according to the guidelines outlined by Kline (2015). This substantial sample size enhances the statistical robustness and reliability of the study's findings.

## **Measurements**

### *Social prejudice scale*

The assessment of social prejudice among Muslim students towards Christians utilized a Social Prejudice Scale developed in accordance with the theory proposed by Hogg and Vaughan (2014). The scale comprises 29 items, demonstrating a high internal consistency with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.884, as reported in Nashori and Nurjannah (2015). Sample statements from the scale include (1) "Religious teachings that I believe play an important role in influencing my life path so far," (2) "I try to behave honestly in

accordance with the teachings of the religion I embrace," and (3) "Although busy, I try to take the time to study religion continuously." Respondents rated items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for favorable statements and from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) for unfavorable statements. This scale was designed to measure the extent of social prejudice exhibited by Muslim students towards Christians in various aspects related to religious beliefs and behaviors.

### ***Agreeableness trait scale***

The Agreeableness Trait Scale was employed to assess individuals' agreeableness traits, developed in alignment with the Big Five Personality theory by Costa and McCrae (1997). This scale comprises 14 items and demonstrates a satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.743, as reported in Nashori et al. (2023). Sample statements from the agreeableness scale include (1) "I care about other people's circumstances," (2) "I choose a modest appearance," and (3) "I believe that others have good intentions." Participants rated items on a scale ranging from 1 (never) to 5 (very often) for favorable statements and from 1 (very often) to 5 (never) for unfavorable statements. The Agreeableness Trait Scale was designed to gauge the degree of agreeableness exhibited by individuals, capturing aspects such as empathy, modesty, and a positive outlook on the intentions of others.

### ***Mature religious sentiment scale***

The Mature Religious Sentiment Scale was utilized to assess the levels of mature religious sentiment among the participants. This scale was developed in accordance with the mature religious sentiment theory proposed by Allport, as outlined by Wulff (1991). Comprising 24 items, the Mature Religious Sentiment Scale exhibited a robust internal consistency, with a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.818, as

reported in Nashori and Nurjannah (2015). Sample statements from the scale include (1) "Religious teachings that I believe play an important role in influencing my life path so far," (2) "I try to behave honestly in accordance with the teachings of the religion I embrace," and (3) "Although busy, I try to take the time to study religion continuously." Participants rated items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree) for favorable statements and from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree) for unfavorable statements. The Mature Religious Sentiment Scale was designed to measure the depth and maturity of participants' religious sentiments, capturing aspects related to the influence of religious teachings on their lives and their commitment to continuous religious study.

#### ***Islamic knowledge between Muslim and non-Muslim relationship scale***

The scale used in this study assessed participants' knowledge about the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims through Islamic perspectives, developed based on the views of Sabiq (2016). The Islamic knowledge scale regarding the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims consists of 26 items. Higher scores indicate a greater level of Islamic knowledge about the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims. The scale has undergone qualitative validation and exhibits sound psychometric properties. On this scale, participants are presented with questions for which they are required to provide either correct or incorrect answers. A correct response is awarded a score of five, while an incorrect one receives a score of zero. This scoring system allows for a quantifiable measure of participants' Islamic knowledge about the dynamics between Muslims and non-Muslims from an Islamic perspective.

## **Data Analysis**

This study employed Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the adequacy of the causal relationship model between the research variables using empirical data. SEM was utilized to estimate both direct and indirect effects, examining the relationships between exogenous and endogenous variables and identifying any potential mediation effects. The data analysis was conducted using the Lisrel 8.8 program. The model's acceptability was evaluated based on several criteria, including Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) ( $< 0.08$ ), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI) ( $> 0.80$ ), Adjusted Goodness of Fit Index (AGFI) ( $> 0.80$ ), Comparative Fit Index (CFI) ( $> 0.80$ ), and chi-square ( $p > 0.05$ ). These criteria served as benchmarks for determining the appropriateness and validity of the proposed structural equation model.

## **RESULTS**

The objective of this study is to investigate the model depicting the influence of mature religious sentiment and Islamic knowledge on social prejudice towards Christians through the intermediary variable of agreeableness trait among Muslim students (refer to [Table 1](#)). The results indicate that the proposed model aligns well with empirical data, as evidenced by good fit indices (RMSEA = 0.058, GFI = 0.91, AGFI = 0.88, CFI = 0.94). Additionally, the findings reveal the following key insights: (1) The agreeableness trait stands out as the sole endogenous variable making a significant contribution to social prejudice (factor loading = -4.08;  $R^2 = 0.45$ ); (2) Islamic knowledge emerges as the exclusive exogenous variable exerting an impact on social prejudice (factor loading = -4.58;  $R^2 = 0.45$ ); (3) Mature religious sentiment, as an exogenous variable, influences the agreeableness trait (factor loading = 6.38;  $R^2 = 0.44$ ); and (4) Mature religious sentiment,

as an independent variable, affects social prejudice (factor loading = 2.61;  $R^2 = 0.45$ ) (refer to [Figure 1](#)).

**Table 1**

*Descriptive Statistics of Variables*

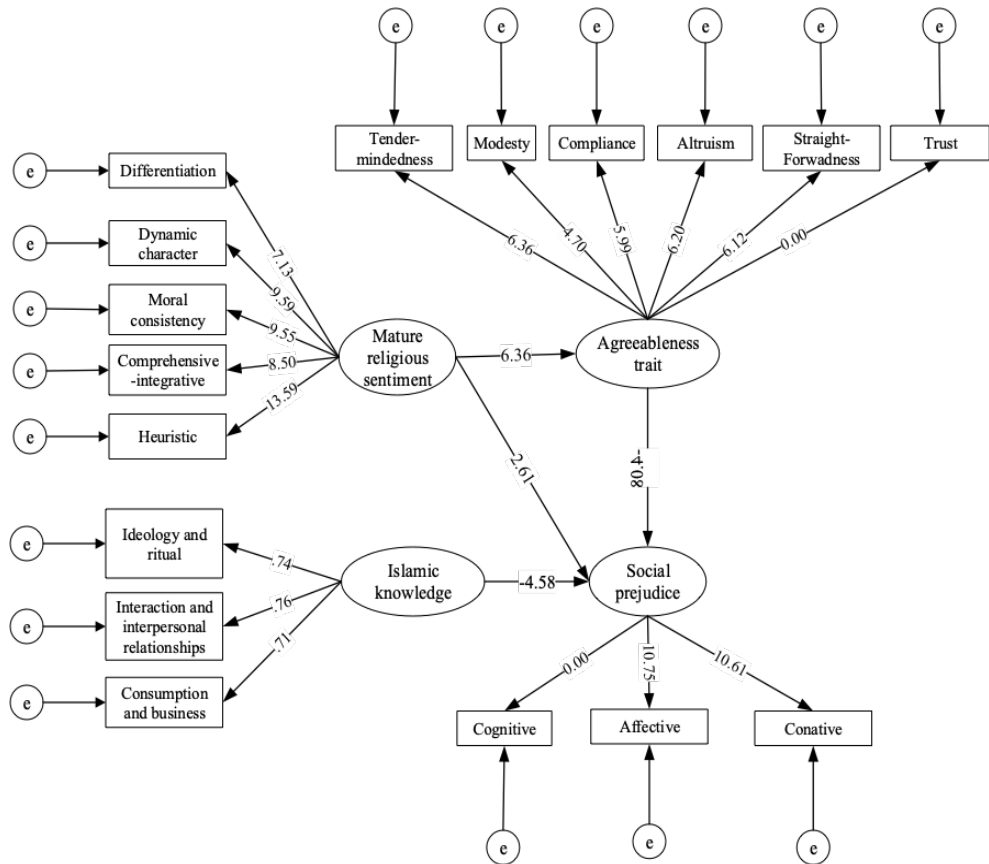
|             | <b>Social prejudice</b> | <b>Agreeableness trait</b> | <b>Mature religious sentiment</b> | <b>Islamic knowledge</b> |
|-------------|-------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Mean</i> | 78.20                   | 50.92                      | 100.13                            | 10.47                    |
| <i>SD</i>   | 78.00                   | 51.00                      | 100.00                            | 11.00                    |

Source: Primary data. Authors' estimation.

Among the aspects of mature religious sentiment, their respective contributions, indicated by factor loadings in descending order, were as follows: heuristic (factor loading = 13.59), dynamic character (factor loading = 9.55), moral consistency (factor loading = 9.59), comprehensive-integrative (factor loading = 8.50), and differentiation (factor loading = 7.13). In terms of Islamic knowledge, the most prominent roles were observed in interaction and interpersonal relationships (factor loading = 5.31), followed by ideology and ritual (factor loading = 4.52), and consumption and business (factor loading = 2.91). Turning to the aspects of the agreeableness trait, their relative significance, denoted by factor loadings in descending order, were tender-mindedness (factor loading = 6.36), altruism (factor loading = 6.20), straight-forwardness (factor loading = 6.12), compliance (factor loading = 5.99), modesty (factor loading = 4.70), and trust (factor loading = 0.00). Lastly, among the aspects of social prejudice, the most notable contributions were found in affective (factor loading = 10.75) and conative (factor loading = 10.61), while cognitive exhibited a factor loading of 0.00. These factor loadings underscore the varying degrees of influence each aspect has within their respective constructs.

**Figure 1**

*The Model of the Influence of Mature Religious Sentiment and Islamic Knowledge on Christian Social Prejudice through Agreeableness trait as Intermediate Variable in Muslim Students*



Source: Primary data. Authors' estimation.

## DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that the proposed model, examining the influence of mature religious sentiment and Islamic knowledge on Christian social prejudice through the intermediary variable of agreeableness trait in Muslim students, is well-supported by empirical data. Notably, the research reveals that the social



prejudice among Muslim students is significantly influenced by mature religious sentiment, Islamic knowledge, and agreeableness. These results align with the model of social prejudice proposed by Nashori and Nurjannah (2015), who conducted their study among Muslim college students residing in a predominantly non-Muslim area. In contrast, the present study focused on Muslim college students in a predominantly Muslim area. Despite this difference in the religious majority, both studies demonstrate that mature religious sentiment exerts a direct influence on social prejudice, both independently and through the agreeableness trait. Additionally, Islamic knowledge directly impacts social prejudice, although it does not significantly affect the agreeableness trait, while the agreeableness trait independently influences social prejudice. The consistency of these findings across diverse religious contexts underscores the robustness of the identified relationships within the model.

*The mature religious sentiment was influenced by agreeableness traits.* The study highlights that mature religious sentiment is positively influenced by the agreeableness trait. This relationship is deeply rooted in Islamic teachings, which emphasize the importance of embodying good deeds (Quran 25:36). Individuals who cultivate a strong sense of religious maturity manifest this command in their daily lives, resulting in the development of kindness and agreeableness traits. The essence of Islam, encapsulated in the concept of "*rahmatan lil 'alamin*" or mercy to all, becomes a guiding principle for individuals with mature religious sentiments. Such individuals, driven by fundamental religious beliefs, tend to foster positive relationships with others, exhibiting positive correlations with the agreeableness trait (Khoynezhad et al., 2012; Rassool, 2021; Yamagata & Takahashi, 2020). McCullough (2001) suggests that personality traits are influenced by the religious values individuals believe in and adhere to, subsequently shaping their social lives. The mature

religious sentiment reinforces agreeableness traits in interactions with others. Through religiosity, individuals align their behavior and moral principles with religious values, promoting prosocial behaviors (Hur et al., 2019). This alignment contributes to the strengthening of an individual's agreeableness (Yamagata & Takahashi, 2020). The core of the agreeableness trait, characterized by affection, instills a moral responsibility toward others, encouraging individuals to share goodwill, especially with those who may have made mistakes.

*Islamic knowledge for reducing social prejudice.* The study underscores the significant role of Islamic knowledge in diminishing social prejudice, as it exerts a direct influence on reducing prejudice. This implies that individuals possessing a greater understanding of Islamic knowledge exhibit lower levels of social prejudice towards others. Psychologists argue that knowledge is a pivotal factor influencing attitudes and behaviors (Ertz & Sarigöllü, 2019; Laeheem, 2018). Positive behaviors are often associated with more extensive and comprehensive knowledge, while negative behaviors are linked to limited and inadequate knowledge. Therefore, enhancing individuals' knowledge can be an effective strategy for reducing social prejudice. Religious knowledge is defined as information about faith and behavioral systems that are interrelated. Individuals with a sound understanding of their religious knowledge are better equipped to align their behavior with their religious beliefs. In Islam, the teachings of the Qur'an emphasize the importance of fostering harmony and tolerance among individuals, ultimately contributing to a reduction in social prejudice (Rassool, 2021). Azwar (2015) posits that an individual's comprehension of ethical distinctions between good and bad plays a pivotal role in shaping attitudes towards others. Additionally, the core of behavioral change in individuals lies in repetition, as repetitive exposure enhances positive behavioral changes (Stojanovic et al., 2021).

The enhancement of Islamic knowledge among Muslim students plays a crucial role in fostering a deeper understanding of the religious commands to engage in benevolent and just actions towards others. Continuous learning about Islam enables individuals to comprehend that Islam emphasizes collaboration or helping each other (*ta'awun*), righteous conduct (*al-birr*), and fairness (*'adl*) towards individuals of different religious beliefs (Nashori & Nurjannah, 2015). Muslims are urged to uphold the rights and dignity of followers of other religions, including Christians (Sabiq, 2017). This commitment to righteous deeds is explicitly commanded by Allah in the Quran, as stated in verse 5:8: “O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm for Allah, witnesses in justice, and do not let the hatred of a people prevent you from being just. Be just; that is nearer to righteousness. And fear Allah; indeed, Allah is acquainted with what you do.”

*Agreeableness trait for reducing social prejudice.* The findings of this study underscore the significant influence of the agreeableness trait on social prejudice. Previous research has consistently demonstrated that agreeableness serves to minimize social prejudice (Brandt & Crawford, 2019; Graziano et al., 2007; Koehn et al., 2019). Individuals possessing an agreeableness trait are inherently motivated to foster intimacy, unity, and solidarity with others. This trait manifests in characteristics such as generosity, friendliness, humility, a tendency to yield, conflict avoidance, and a propensity to follow others (McCrae & Costa, 2003). Such traits guide individuals to comprehend and engage in benevolent actions towards others, even those from different religious backgrounds. The understanding of others and the motivation to perform good deeds contribute to reducing prejudice towards individuals from diverse religious communities. Koehn et al. (2019) showed that individuals with lower levels of agreeableness tend to exhibit more prejudiced attitudes.

Devout Muslims, following the example set by Prophet Muhammad, peace be upon Him, are inclined to engage in virtuous actions such as caring, generosity, sincerity, trust, and humility towards others, irrespective of their principles or religion. Prophet Muhammad, despite facing unfavorable treatment from Jews, exemplified kindness in response. This benevolence extends to individuals with different principles or religions. The inherent kindness and affection encapsulated in the agreeableness trait compel individuals to shoulder a moral responsibility towards others. This sense of moral responsibility prompts individuals to share their resources with those who err, fostering a culture of empathy and understanding (Nashori et al., 2020). Such moral responsibility plays a crucial role in minimizing negative feelings and attitudes, including social prejudice.

*Mature religious sentiment for enhancing social prejudice.* The study's findings reveal a noteworthy result: mature religious sentiment influences social prejudice, with higher religiosity correlating with increased social prejudice. This outcome aligns with previous research indicating that strong adherence to religious values within a group can lead to negative attitudes and feelings towards members of other groups, culminating in social prejudice and stereotypes (Rowatt & Al-Kire, 2021). Additionally, studies by Altemeyer and Hunsberger (Rahman, 2019) suggest that robust religious beliefs, particularly those emphasizing fundamental truths, intrinsic religiosity, and a conviction that adhering to the truth garners a special place in God's favor, are associated with higher social prejudice towards individuals outside the group. It's important to note that these findings stand in contrast to some other research results, which indicate that high mature religious sentiment among adolescents correlates with lower levels of social prejudice (Shaver et al., 2016) and reduced interreligious prejudice concerning religious

development (Streib & Klein, 2014). The discrepancy in research outcomes underscores the need for further investigation involving a more diverse range of research subjects to comprehensively understand the relationship between religious maturity and social prejudice.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study acknowledges certain limitations that could impact the generalizability of its findings. The sample size being derived from a single location implies that the results are applicable primarily to Muslim students in that specific context. Consequently, the study may not provide insights into how the proposed model of the relationship between religion and social prejudice operates in different age groups or among adherents of other religions. To address these limitations and gain a more comprehensive understanding, future research is encouraged to encompass a broader spectrum of religious believers, including individuals from various age groups and diverse religious backgrounds such as Christian Protestant, Christian Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, and Confucianism. Expanding the scope of the study to include a more diverse sample would contribute to a more nuanced and comprehensive exploration of the dynamics surrounding interreligious relationships and social prejudice.

### **Implications for Reducing Social Prejudice in Diverse Communities**

A nation or region characterized by considerable diversity necessitates elements conducive to fostering tolerance and harmony within its community. The findings of this research indicate that the interplay of Islamic knowledge within Muslim and non-Muslim relationships significantly impacts social prejudice, particularly in the context of interreligious biases. Mitigating social prejudice among religious communities entails an earnest effort to enhance religious awareness, with a specific focus on augmenting Islamic knowledge in

interactions between Muslims and non-Muslims. These endeavors must not solely target the majority community but extend to the minority as well, fostering mutual understanding and tolerance. The overarching goal is to diminish social prejudice stemming from insufficient knowledge. Governments, religious authorities, educational institutions, and even families bear the responsibility of comprehending and imparting religious insights, particularly to young adults and college students. In the Indonesian context, the attenuation of conflict and social prejudice between Islam and Christianity can be achieved through the optimization of Islamic knowledge pertaining to Muslim and non-Muslim relationships.

The study suggests the importance of considering religious diversity in the formulation of social policies to achieve social inclusion of various religions. It aligns with Traunmüller's (2013) recommendation that recognizing and incorporating religious diversity in policy contexts is crucial for fostering social inclusion. The aim is to address sources of religious intolerance rooted in socio-political and cultural factors (Sarigili, 2018; Stewart, 2018). Despite existing laws in Indonesia that guarantee the rights of every religious community, conflicts between religions persist, posing a potential threat. The study advocates for a critical and in-depth examination of religious diversity to inform and shape policies effectively. By incorporating religious diversity as a foundational element of policy-making, it is hoped that conflicts and social prejudice between different religious communities can be better addressed. In essence, the study calls for a more comprehensive approach to policy development that acknowledges and respects religious diversity, aiming to create an inclusive environment where the rights and beliefs of various religious groups are protected and respected.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study reveals that mature religious sentiment and Islamic understanding of Muslim-Christian relationships impact social prejudice towards Christians, with the mediation of agreeableness. There is an inverse relationship between religious knowledge and social prejudice, indicating that a higher level of religious knowledge is associated with reduced social prejudice. Conversely, mature religious sentiment is positively correlated with increased social prejudice. Mature religious sentiment affects social prejudice both directly and indirectly through the agreeableness trait. In contrast, Islamic knowledge concerning Muslim and non-Muslim relationships directly influences social prejudice without involving the agreeableness trait as a mediator.

Further research is imperative to ascertain the generalizability of the findings beyond the current Muslim student context. Firstly, investigations should explore prejudice from adherents of Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism towards Muslims. Secondly, it is essential to broaden the scope of research to investigate Muslim prejudices against followers of religions other than Christianity, encompassing Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and even extending to Jews and atheists. This comprehensive approach will provide a more nuanced understanding of interreligious dynamics and prejudice across diverse religious contexts.

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The study was approved by Fakultas Psikologi dan Ilmu Sosial Budaya, Universitas Islam Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Indonesia with Description of Research Ethics Letter No: 430/DEK/70/DURT/I/2024.

## **Informed Consent Statement**

Informed consent for this study was obtained through written agreement before participating in an online survey.

## **Data Availability Statement**

The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

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## **Conflicts of Interest**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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