

## Suggestibility and Sense of Belongingness of Various Religious Groups in Kerala

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### ABSTRACT

Understanding complex religious influences is a critical dimension of understanding modern human affairs (Harvard's Religious Literacy Project). The influence has an impact on human beings varying from sense of perceived control to meaningful community life. The present study examined whether religiosity has any impact on any role on individuals' level of suggestibility and sense of belongingness or not? To investigate this question, data was collected from three religious groups in Kerala (N=375). There were participants from Hinduism (n=155), Islam (n=109) and Christianity (n=111). The variables -religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness were measured using the Belief into Action Scale (Koenig, Wang, Zaben & Adi, 2015), Multidimensional Iowa Short Suggestibility Scale (Kotov, Bellman & Watson, 2004), and Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hegarty & Patusky, 1995) respectively. Spearman ranks correlation and regression analysis was done to interpret the results. The study findings have implications for research and understanding the role of religion in human wellbeing.

**Keywords:** *Suggestibility, Sense of Belongingness, Religiosity*

From the beginning of civilization, humankind had a complicated relationship with God. For some, God represent a master, whose rules we have to strongly adhere to, collectively and without fail; for some others he represents a true guide and friend who sustains, and forgives you without fail. Among certain faiths he is a flawed immortal who tries his best to raise his followers to higher ground, not to mention people who completely disregard the very essence of God and believe we live in a simulation. Whatever an individual's belief may be, the notion that religion is a significant part of humankind holds no further question.

While religiosity may be considered part of our culture or a social construct, one of our innate needs is the need to belong. A study was conducted by Gebauer and Maio (2012) to understand whether the need to belong can motivate belief in God, which concluded that people who have low social connectedness, have increased belief in God to reinstate their sense of purpose while for people with high social connectedness, their sense of purpose

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seems to be driven by their relationships rather than belief in God. A later study conducted by Cappellen and his colleagues (2017) concluded that there is a positive correlation between religion, implicit attitudes and behavioural measures of general social affiliation. This study and several other studies on this area explain how religiosity and sense of belonging are deeply intertwined. It is clear that across any cross-cultural, racial, or gender-based differentiation, this is a need for human beings to belong, which is projected in almost every relationship human form. This need is so often romanticized and portrayed in our daily media content of books and movies ranging from romantic relationship, friendships to familial love. While growing up, to satisfy our sense of belonging often through classical, operational conditioning or observational learning we internalise and conform to the group values and norms.

This indirectly points out to the final variable of suggestibility. Being social human beings in the era of the internet, we are constantly bombarded with information, of which we might be suggestible to certain pieces that fill the criteria of injunctive and descriptive norms within the group. In the context of this study, we try to understand whether an individual's suggestibility, rooted in their sense of belonging, influences their level of religiosity.

### **Religiosity**

The exact definition of religiosity may be difficult to define, but many anthropologists and sociologists consider religiosity to be a broad concept that involves ideological, experiential, individualistic, consequential, credal, ritualistic, doctrinal, communal, cultural and moral dimensions. One of the most prominent definitions is by Hackney and Sanders (2003), who define religiosity as “*a multi-layered concept involving cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural aspects*”. The notion that religiosity is complex and is multidimensional has been observed from 1900 and went through significant re-evaluation in the late 1900s.

In 1944, Joachim Wach divided the dimensions of religiosity into three, namely 1) Theoretical dimension, which advocates for the strength of adherence to the doctrine, 2) Cultic dimension, which refers to the level of devotion and worship of an individual and 3) Sociological dimension, which accounts for an individual's involvement in religious activities. The higher the person is in these three dimensions, the higher they are likely to be religious. Through further research, Glock (1962) proposed religiosity as a five-dimensional model that includes Religious Beliefs, Religious Exclusivity, External Religiosity, Personal Practice, and Religious Salience. According to this model, 1) Religious Beliefs refer to the doctrine or ideologies individuals adhere by, and acceptance of the standard set of religious belief, such as God, supernatural and so on. 2) Religious Exclusivity dimension shares a similarity with dogmatism and this dimension has been attributed to religious fundamentalism, which makes it important in studying values, behaviour, and distinguishing what is acceptable from what is not, within the realm of religion. 3) External Religiosity refers to religious worship-place attendance, group membership, and fellowship activities. 4) Personal Practice involves religious practises undertaken by an individual alone and this requires dedication. It is referred to as devotional or personal connection to God. Finally, 5) Religious Salience represents an individual's religious position among their family, friends, spouse, and so on. This dimension denotes how religion has an impact on our day-to-day life. Pargament (2000) identifies five major functions of Religiosity: 1) Meaning: Religion plays a key role in understanding meaning (Greez,1966).

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This implies that religion acts as a framework or rather as a safety net to understand and interpret life events or to fall back in case of suffering. 2) Control: Religion allows individuals to feel a sense of control when confronted with events beyond capabilities. Theorists like Fromm (1950) have emphasized the role of religion in gaining a sense of control. 3) Comfort: Religion helps to reduce an individual's apprehension about the world, where disaster could happen at any moment (Freud, 1961). 4) Intimacy: The desire to connect to a force beyond is a key essence of religion (Johnson, 1959). Religion may also play a key role in facilitating social cohesiveness (Durkheim, 1915) as it develops social solidarity and identity through spiritual methods. 5) Life Transformation: Religion can help people to move on from adverse events in life and act as an aid in moving on to better ventures (Paragant, 1997).

### ***Suggestibility***

According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2021), suggestibility is defined as "an inclination to readily and uncritically adopt the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, or actions of others". Suggestions provided overtime can lead to Uncritical/Unreasoned responses to a situation. Suggestibility can be further divided into primary, secondary and tertiary suggestibility as proposed by Eysenck and Furneaux (1945). Primary suggestibility refers to a form of suggestibility to overt influence as in hypnotic or ideomotor suggestion; it is also known as direct suggestibility. Secondary suggestibility refers to a form of suggestibility that stems from indirect or hidden influence and is only weakly correlated to primary suggestibility; it is also called indirect suggestibility. Tertiary suggestibility refers to easy, uncritical acceptance of a recommendation of someone else due to social pressure or prestige of the person who makes the recommendation.

It is generally agreed by sociologists and psychologists that suggestibility is influenced mainly by three factors: situational factors, usual/current states, and personality traits (Addressing Suggestibility as a Psychological Phenomenon in Clinical Trials, n.d.). Situational factors involve elements such as the authority, prestige of the person providing the suggestion, peer pressure, and placebo response. The usual/current state involves attention, motivation, expectations, and conditions such as hypnosis. Personal factors refer to the characteristics of the person receiving the suggestion, which include their disposition to delusion and degree of conformity. A fourth factor that is less acknowledged is the lack of knowledge around the subject matter that is being suggested. As already mentioned, the placebo effect plays a significant role in suggestibility. A 'placebo' refers to a beneficial effect of a placebo drug or treatment which cannot be attributed to the effect of the drug itself but rather the belief of the patient. Through this, one could raise the argument that suggestible people are less likely to engage in analytical thinking, especially when it comes to emotionally important or spontaneous decisions. Another plausible reason might be confirmation bias, where people only intake information that serves their narrative while disregarding other contradictory information. In this study, we will explore how suggestibility specifically influences the level of religiosity.

### ***Sense of Belongingness***

Belonging usually refers to the acceptance of being a member or part of a group. As Maslow (1943) proposed, the need for belonging is essential and plays a significant role in motivation soon after psychological and safety needs. A sense of belongingness can induce a higher level of self-esteem and open the path to self-actualization. This very sense of belongingness could be achieved by interpersonal relationships with friends, family, spouse and co-workers. Our interests, motivation, behaviour, health, and happiness are intrinsically

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connected to the sense that we belong to a greater community with the same goals, aspirations, and interests as us. (Walton, 2007).

A single instance of exclusion can lower our motivation and thereby our subjective well-being. Many people seem to struggle with this concept of feeling like they belong; as a result, many turn to concepts such as religiosity which feel socially acceptable, while some others turn to habits such as substance abuse which are socially frowned upon. Walton (2007) developed '*attributional retraining*' where individuals are trained to re-shift the negative attribution of their failures to the sense that they are not alone in this experience. The roots of this exercise can be traced back to the very need of belonging and how significant it is to shift an individual's focus from a failed event as their incapability, to instead, a collective sense and hope to make things better. Although this specific training was developed for college students, anybody can participate in the same and re-evaluate their stance. Carter (2018) proposes ten dimensions for fostering belonging; although it is catered towards individuals who have disabilities, we can extend the same to other individuals. The dimensions are: Present, Invited, Welcomed, Known, Accepted, Supported, Cared For, Befriended, Needed, and Loved. In the context of this particular study, we will try to understand how this sense of belongingness influence religiosity.

### *Rationale of the Study*

1. Amidst this volatile political religious situation and increasing numbers of religious nationalists in the country, one not based on secular principles, (Vaishnav, 2021) it is necessary to understand what exactly drives individuals to become one in the first place. In this study I have tried to analyse how much religiosity correlates with suggestibility and sense of belongings and how significant is the relationship between these variables. This will help to shed a miniature light on this deep-rooted systemic issue of fundamental religious nationalism.
2. As social beings, we are exposed to immense information within a small frame of time and often share information in line with our cognitive biases without fact-checking (Shin, Thorson; 2017). This brings us to the question of how suggestible people are, and whether it influences their religiosity. A study conducted among the Ivy Universities points out how religious fundamentalists are more susceptible to news with no fact-value and this may be attributed to reduced engagement in open-minded and analytical thinking. (Bronstein, Pennycook, Bear, Rand, & Cannon, 2019). Through this study I aim to understand whether there is any significant relationship between suggestibility and religiosity across three religions of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism in Kerala.
3. Religiosity is significantly correlated with physical and mental health, tolerance-social behaviour, and interpersonal relationships. (Tsang & McCullough, 2003). One key reason proposed by several studies is the need for belonging. Although this may be the case, not many studies have been conducted to understand the level of variations in religiosity among different religions. The current research aims to understand the association between Suggestibility, Sense of Belongingness and Religiosity across the three religions prevalent within Kerala: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity.
4. Religion being something that is integrated to everything we are working on and thinking about in life today (Kerry, 2013) religion significantly affects international, national and local politics through its ideas and sentiments. Hence it is important to understand how religion influences individuals to increase one's own awareness in

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global complexity and learning how individuals are influenced by religion in the area you live can act as an initiation point which is what this study precisely focuses on.

5. Since this study is conducted in the context of Kerala, Kerala being a state where different religions co-exist, ranging from religious fundamentalists to atheists, this study will illuminate more on the effect of religiosity across different cultures.

### ***Research Question***

1. Is there any correlation present between religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness in Christians?
2. Is there any correlation present between religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness in Muslims?
3. Is there any correlation present between religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness in Hindus?

### ***Objectives of the Study***

1. To find out the relationship between suggestibility and religiosity among Christians, Hindus and Muslims.
2. To find out the relationship between need for belonging and religiosity among Christians, Hindus and Muslims.
3. To find out the relationship between suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Christians, Hindus and Muslims.

### ***Hypotheses of the Study***

- H1. There will be a correlation between religiosity and suggestibility among Christians, Hindus and Muslim.
- H2. There will be a correlation between the religiosity and sense of belonging among Christians, Hindus and Muslims.
- H3. There will be correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Christians, Hindus and Muslims.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter attempts to check with the previous studies that have already been done on religiosity, sense of belongingness and suggestibility. Review of literature will bring out studies that have already done in these areas of research, the feasibility of the study and the research gap will provide a clear idea about the study. The following articles cover some of the previous studies conducted in the following variables: Religiosity, Suggestibility and Sense of Belongingness

To examine the relationship between low socioeconomic status and religiosity, a study was conducted by Brandt and Henry (2012), which hypothesized that low-status individuals will be more religious than people in the higher economic status and predicted that religiosity would at least partially be mediated by Psychological Defensiveness; they also put forward two contingencies that this mediation effect would be stronger in wealthy countries and the association between religious belief and socioeconomic status would be stronger in wealthy countries.

This study was conducted by cross-cultural analyses of data from over 90 countries including highly autonomous regions. They measured it on basis of two dimensions namely based on socio-income and educational qualification of the participant and their religious beliefs and psychological defensiveness (in this study they focused on their trust in other

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people) through a single item questionnaire for both. The results supported the hypothesis. People in the group of lower-economic status exhibited more psychological defensiveness and are hence inferred to be more religious than their higher counterparts. True to the hypothesis, the mediation effect and association between economic status and religious beliefs were stronger in wealthy countries, which explains that religiosity may act as a protective psychological tool for people in the lower-economic status, independent of realistic economic concerns.

A study was conducted by Guzman, Pagdonsolan, Parel, Parial, Pastor Evan and Perez (2007), intending to examine the elderly and their sense of belongingness. The study was conducted among 40 elderly in a Filipino government-run old age home through elicitation interviews which were transcribed, and doodling their sense of belongingness before and during their admission to the old age home. Based on the data the feelings and emotions were categorized into 3 levels: Plain (the feeling of abandonment and abolition), Plateau (the feeling of adaptation and assurance), and Pinnacle (Feeling of attachment and actualization). Furthermore, they observed how the elderly strengthen their religious belief to deal with their emotional loss and how there was no significant difference in these levels based on their gender. Both genders exhibited the level of pinnacle before admitting to the old age home followed by the levels of plain and plateau after admission.

In lines of this same concept, another study was conducted by Krause and Bastida (2011) in which the aim of the study was to explain how church based emotional support influences the health of older Mexican Americans. A series of close ended questionnaires and open interviews were conducted to understand the association. The study was evaluated on the basis of a theoretical model with the core points being older Mexican-Americans who go to church more often are more likely to get emotional support from fellow church members, Members who receive more emotional support are more likely to feel that they belong in the congregation, members who feel they belong in the congregation have a better sense of personal control and members who have a stronger sense of control are more likely to enjoy better health.

Results indicated there was significant correlation between each of these variables which points out that through religion, people have a better sense of belonging which is not only visible in the psychological level but in terms of physical health too.

A study was conducted in 2011 by Stroop to understand the influence of religious beliefs and interactions on the members' sense of belonging. Through analysis of sample congregation from USCLS with a national sample of 1,214 congregations and several others, the study concluded that church members' religious belief, group level belief, unity, and their interactions positively influence members' sense of belonging.

To understand whether the Need to Belong can Motivate Belief in God, research was conducted by Gebauer and Maio (2012), measured across 4 studies. In the first study, from 40 undergraduate students, after their Image of God (as accepting and loving or as rejecting and hating) was measured using Image of God Scale (Benson and Spilka, 1973), they read a fake astrophysics article proving God's existence and some those astrophysics cannot prove God's existence. As per the results, people in the Pro-God condition reported higher belief in God compared to the control group if they had an accepting and loving image of God but the lower belief of God when their image was rejecting. Study 2 replicated Study 1 while directly assessing whether there was any correlation between the need for belongingness and

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belief in God. 72 participants were satisfied by priming their belongingness needs where they were asked to describe people who love and accept them while the control group was asked to describe acquaintances. The results concluded that the effects observed in Study 1 did not occur in Study 2, and the effects are dependent upon the image of God by the participants. Study 3 tried to analyse the correlation between chronic, rather than manipulated belief in God, and manipulated, rather than a chronic image of God through the internet by presenting single item questionnaires and presenting stimulus related to 'God is accepting/God is rejecting' condition for 79 participants. Chronic believers in 'God is rejecting' conditions reported less religious intention; this effect was mediated by less closeness to God, compared to chronic Believers in 'God is accepting' conditions. Study 4 replicated Study 3 where 106 participants reported that their belief in God is motivated by the need for belongingness through a three-item scale.

Similar to this study, to understand whether religiosity provides a sense of belonging to the socially disconnected, Chan, Michalak, Ybarra (2018) conducted a study particularly aimed to examine whether religion can compensate for social disconnection and provide a sense of purpose for individuals. They conducted three studies, in which the first study focused on how religious beliefs compensate for purpose in life and social disconnection. Across 11,213 participants, UCLA Loneliness scale (Russell, 1996), Brief Multidimensional Measure of Religious/Spirituality (Fetzer Institute, 2003) and Purpose of Life scale (Riff and Keyes, 1995) was administered. They concluded that there is a significant negative correlation between loneliness and purpose of life and that among individuals who experience social disconnectedness, religion is used for compensation, to reinstall a sense of purpose. In study 2, they aimed to understand how likely is it for people to turn to God as a source of support and as a coping mechanism when they experience social disconnectedness, operationalizing religion and social connectedness through a perceived friendship scale. Across 5,268 participants, Friendship Effectual Solidarity (Walch and Lachman, 2000) and Religious/Spiritual Coping B Scale (Ryff, Singer and Palmersheim, 2004) were administered. Results indicated that there is a strong correlation between friendship quality, the purpose of life, and religiosity. For people who have high social connectedness, their purpose of life is driven by their social connection and religiosity played less factor while people who are socially disconnected and highly religious reported greater purpose in life compared to people who are socially disconnected and less religious. In study 3, they aimed to determine that the result of study 2 was cross-sectional and that religion bolsters the purpose of life for socially disconnected people over time. The same scales in study 2 were administered among 3,294 participants and through these longitudinal findings they were able to prove that religiosity increases purpose in life overtime for the socially disconnected.

A similar study was conducted by Aydin, Fischer and Frey. (2010) in which they studied the association of social exclusion and belief of religion over a 5-series of studies. Through the study, the effect of social exclusion on religiousness including self-esteem, perceived control, meaning of life, social self-certainty, the need to control and moreover whether religiousness was a successful coping mechanism was measured through self-reporting questionnaires. Results concluded that socially excluded people exhibited higher affiliation to religion, stronger intention to engage in religious behaviour and reduced stress as well as aggression as a by-product of social rejection compared to other neutral individuals. Belief in religion was exhibited to be a powerful coping mechanism.

A cross-sectional, questionnaire study was conducted among 156 students by Granqvist and Hagekull (2000) using relationship with God (RG), religious change (RC) by Kirkpatrick

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and Shaver 1990, Emotionally based religiosity (EBRS) by Bowlby (1969) and Attachment Style by Hazan and Shaver (1987) to understand the association of adult attachment style and religious beliefs. There was a positive correlation between the two with avoidance and ambivalence style similar to secure attachment style. Singles exhibited to be more religiously active, harbour a more personal relationship with God and act on basis of affect regulation in contrast to people in relationships.

To understand the relationship between analytical thinking and religion, a study was conducted on analytic thinking promotes religious disbelief by Gervais and Norweyzayan, 2012 which focused on the cognitive processes that promote religious disbelief, hypothesizing that analytical thinking promotes religious disbelief. Across several studies conducted among 179 undergraduates where they asked participants to indulge in tasks override followed by eliciting analytic tasks that provided evidence of causation and subtle manipulations that trigger analytic processing, they concluded that analytic thinking (presumably among several) factors promotes religious disbelief. Similar to this study another study was conducted by Bronstein, Pennycook, Bear, Rand, and Cannon 2018 that examined individuals to understand which group is more susceptible to fake news. The study was conducted among 900 participants, in which they were exposed to 12 real and fake news in random order and were asked to report the accuracy of it. The delusionality was measured using the Peters et al Inventory (2004) and cognitive style was measured using the short version of Stanovich and West actively open-mind Thinking Scale, a six-point scale, or the Cognitive Reflective Test with 7 items (Fredrick, 2005). Dogmatic Thinking was measured using the Dog Scale (Altemeyer, 2002) consisting of 20 items and religious Fundamentalism was measured using the Religious Fundamentalism Scale (Altemeyer and Hunsberg, 1992) which consisted of 20 items. This study concluded that delusion prone individuals, dogmatic individualists, and religious fundamentalists are more susceptible to fake news and light of prior studies this may be partially or fully attributed to reduced engagement in actively open-minded and analytic thinking which may discourage implausible beliefs. Another study was conducted by Shenhav Rand, Green (2012) to examine how cognitive style influences belief in God. It is hypothesized that the extent to which belief in God may be influenced by the general tendency to rely on intuition rather than reflection. They conducted three studies among 882+321+373 participants. In study 1, they examined the correlation between individual cognitive styles and belief in God through administering the CRT test (Fredrick, 2005) along with a demographic scale containing questions about belief in God. In study 2 they performed the same by controlling cognitive ability (IQ) and personality using the Wechsler Adult Intelligence test (1997) and Neo-personal Inventory (1992), and in the 3rd study, they studied the correlation between the experimentally induced mindset of intuition and reported belief in God. Research conducted that in the first study, participants who gave more intuitive answers on the CRT test reported stronger belief in God which was not mediated by any other demographic variables. Study 2 further supported the hypothesis when IQ and personality were controlled. Study 3 revealed that experimentally inducing a mindset of intuition over reflection increases self-reported belief in God.

To understand the relationship between Hypnotic Susceptibility and Reported Religious Experience, a study was conducted by Hood, 1973 designed to understand whether there is an association between hypnotic susceptibility and Religious experience. It was hypothesized that there will be a positive correlation between high levels of religiosity and hypnotic susceptibility's study was conducted among 96 students using the Hoods religion experience episodes measure scale which consists of 15 items to measure the religiosity



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variable and Harvard Group Scale of Hypnotic susceptibility with 12 items was used to measure susceptibility. No definite result was concluded but rather the study is open to the idea that possibility of similar belief systems between good hypnotic individuals and intense religious experience cannot be ignored or in fact, intense religious experience may indicate a deeper understanding of reality and hypnosis might just be one of the indicators. To understand the relationship between suggestibility and need for belonging a study was conducted by (Benedan et al., 2018) on “Suggestibility in Neglected children: The influence of Intelligence, Language and Social skills” in a sample group of 5-12 year old children whether the neglected children’s(75) response to leading questions distinguish from non-neglected children(75) across 2 studies to measure suggestibility through GSS-2 and its subsequent effects on intellectual functioning, language ability and social skills through a series of tests. They concluded that while there was no correlation between negligence, intelligence and language skills, there was marginal positive correlation between negligence, social skills, assertion and engagement driven by suggestibility.

To understand the relationship between belonging, conformity and social status in early adolescence a study was conducted was by Grinman and Mariana (2002). The aim of the study was to understand whether the willingness to conform to antisocial or neutral activities were influenced by peer acceptance and sense of belonging. The study was conducted among 5<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> grade students across different ethnicities where they had to fill out close ended questionnaires. Results indicated Indo-Canadian and Asian students were less likely to conform to antisocial behaviour compared to Caucasian students. Older students were likely to conform compared to students in the lower grades. Students who were more accepted were more likely to report a greater sense of belonging.

A series of studies were conducted by Cappellen and his colleagues to further understand religious priming and its relationship with social and informational conformity. The initial study was conducted in 2009 by Saroglou, Corneille, and Cappellen in which two subsequent experiments were conducted to understand the association between religion, submissiveness and conformity. In the first experiment the individual’s religion-submission association strength was tested using a lexical decision task. In experiment 2, the subjects were either primed with religious or neutral concepts and then and were invited or not by the experimenter to take revenge on someone who allegedly criticised them. In this experiment, religious priming increased the accessibility of submission-related concepts and the acceptance of a morally problematic request for revenge. This study concluded that religious priming activates submissive thoughts and behaviour. A study conducted on 2011 in addition to this by Cappellen, Corneille., Cols and Saroglou. on “Beyond mere compliance to authoritative figures: Religious priming increases conformity to informational influence among submissive people.” The effect of religious priming on informational conformity. In this experiment the subjects were primed with subtle religious or control cues and were asked to complete a numerical estimation task. In this task, they were free to whether refer or not to numerical estimation provided allegedly by their peers. Results indicated that participants primed with religious cues were more likely to assimilate their peer estimation, at least for those participants that scored high on dispositional submissiveness. The study concluded that religious priming increases conformity to informational influence among submissive people. In lines of this study, another study was conducted by Cappellen., Fredrickson, Saroglou, and Corneille, (2017) in a series of 3 experiments. In the first experiment, the participants were asked to participate in a mediation, after which they were suggested to take a sit next to where things were kept, indicating the presence of another person. Scores were recorded based on how far the person decided to sit from the seat, the

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things were kept in. Results indicated that religiosity is weakly related to the motivation to affiliate. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> experiment, the Pictorial Attitude Implicit Association Test for Need for Affiliation was used to measure affiliation and this experiment was conducted similar to the first experiment except the seats already filled were taken by a Christian or an atheist. The results indicated that effect of religiosity on social affiliation did not extend to members of value threatening outgroups such as atheists. Also, it was observed how religious participants demonstrated in-group preference without out-group derogation. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> experiment, participants were asked to be part of an online ball tossing game and were manipulated to believe that they were playing with three other players who are Christian, atheist and someone whose religion is not specified. Similar results to Study 1 and 2 are obtained. The study in total concluded that religiosity does relate to implicit and behavioural measures of general social affiliation.

### ***Summary***

A number of studies pertaining to religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness were pointed out in this chapter. A substantial number of studies shows association between religiosity and sense of belongingness. Individuals who are high in religiosity tend to have high sense of belongingness. Several studies also pointed out that high religiosity in association with sense of belongingness was usually observed among older individuals. For people who have high social connectedness, their purpose of life is driven by their social connection and religiosity played less factor while people who are socially disconnected and highly religious reported greater purpose in life compared to people who are socially disconnected and less religious.

Only few studies were conducted to understand association between suggestibility and religiosity which seem to give positive results while most remain inconclusive. Studies also suggested delusion prone individuals, dogmatic individualists, and religious fundamentalists are more susceptible to fake news and light of prior studies this may be partially or fully attributed to reduced engagement in actively open-minded and analytic thinking which may discourage implausible beliefs and religious priming is more likely to increase conformity to informational influence among submissive people. In this study we further delve into the relationship between religiosity, suggestibility and need for belongingness among three different religions of Christianity, Islam and Hinduism within Kerala.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter gives an outline of the research methods that were followed in the study. The method that has been adopted in this research was carefully designed so as to go well with the inquiry. This chapter describes the research design that was chosen for the purpose of this study and also mentions the research questions and objectives of the study. It provides information on participants, that is, criteria for inclusion in the study, how they were sampled and who the participants were. The researcher mentions operational definition so as to provide a clear understanding of the variables that the study focuses on. The instruments that were used for data collection and the method used to analyse data is also mentioned in this chapter. Finally, ethical consideration in the process is also discussed.

### ***Research Design***

The research design used in this study is a correlational design. A correlational design is one in which two or more variables are measured and the statistical relationship between them is assessed.

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### ***Sample and Sampling***

The population of interest consists a sample size of 375 with participants from Hinduism (n=155), Islam (n=109) and Christianity (n=111). Purposive sampling is strategized as it is a type of non-probability sampling where participants are selected based on easier availability if they meet the following exclusion-inclusion criteria:

### ***Inclusion Criteria***

- 1)Adults from the age group of 18-50
- 2)Knowledge of English language

### ***Exclusion Criteria***

- 1)People with severe mental illness
- 2)People who do not know English Language

### ***Operational definitions***

#### **Religiosity**

Religiosity is a multi-layered concept involving cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioural aspects (Hakey and Sanders, 2003), In this study, it can be defined as the scores obtained by the adults in belief attitude scale (Koenig, Wang, Zaben and Adi; 2015).

#### **Suggestibility**

Suggestibility can be defined as the degree to which 1) He/she has ready-made stimulus-response mechanisms that are effectively conditioned to definite stimuli. 2) In the degree to which interrupting and inhibiting stimulus-response or psychic behaviour patterns are absent and 3) The immediacy and un-reflectiveness with which the response follows the stimulus. (Luther Lee Bernard, 1926) In this study, suggestibility may be defined as the score obtained by the adults in Multidimensional Iowa Short Susceptibility Scale (Kotov, Bellman & Watson; 2004)

#### **Sense of Belonging**

A feeling of being taken in and accepted as part of a group fosters the sense of belonging. It also relates to being approved of and accepted by society in general. (Pam.,2013). In this study, a sense of belonging may be defined as the score obtained by adults in the Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hegarty & Patusky, 1995)

### ***Tools***

#### **Socio-demographic sheet**

This questionnaire is used to understand the general characteristics of the individual. For the purpose of this study, age, gender, educational qualification, marital status, income, religion and occupation were given as items.

#### **The Belief into Action Scale**

This questionnaire was developed by Koenig, Wang, Zaben and Adi in 2015 and it was designed in response to concerns that many religious measures only superficially assess the level of religiosity and often have ceiling effects in population known to be highly religious. This questionnaire consists of 10 questions rated on a 1-10 scale (Except the first question which receives a value of 1 or 10 depending on the response). The subject can score a maximum of 100 and minimum of 10 in this scale. A reliability of 0.84 was reported.

**Table 1 Reliability Statistics of Religiosity Scale**

<i><math>\alpha</math></i>	<i>N</i>	<i>No. of items</i>
.59	375	10

Table 1 shows that the  $\alpha= 0.59$  for the items in the religiosity questionnaire. This questionnaire is reliable for the current sample.

**Multidimensional Iowa Short Suggestibility Scale**

This questionnaire was developed by Kotov, Bellman and Watson (2004) with the objective of identifying the general factor while maintaining the diversity of content involved in suggestibility. This questionnaire consists of 21 items with a 5-point scale ranging from not at all, which is given a score of 1 to a lot, which is scored as 5. The subject can score a maximum of 105 and a minimum of 21 in this scale. The authors reported the scale to have 0.85 reliability and 0.93 validity.

**Table 2 Reliability Statistics of Suggestibility Scale**

<i><math>\alpha</math></i>	<i>N</i>	<i>No. of items</i>
.898	375	21

Table 2 shows that the  $\alpha= 0.898$  for the items in the suggestibility questionnaire. This questionnaire is reliable for the current sample.

**Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hegarty & Patusky, 1995)**

This questionnaire was developed by Hegarty and Patusky, 1995 to understand the sense of belongingness, peer support, and student social media use and how these factors influence their mental health, overall wellbeing and confidence. This scale consists of 31 items with a 4 point from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (4). There are two separately scored scales. The SOBI-P which consists of items from 1-18 with a reliability measures psychological state of sense of belonging on their social environment. The SOBI-A with a reliability score of 0.91 of items from 19-31 measures antecedents to their sense of belonging – energy, potential, and desire for involvement. Participants are asked to rate the items SOBI-P ranged from 21-72 and scores on the SOBI-A ranged from 19-36.

**Table 3 Reliability Statistics of Sense of Belongingness Scale**

<i><math>\alpha</math></i>	<i>N</i>	<i>No. of items</i>
.752	375	31

Table 3 shows that the  $\alpha=0.752$  for the items in the Sense of Belonging questionnaire. This questionnaire is reliable for the current sample.

**Data Collection**

375 participants in total from three different religions of Christianity, Hinduism and Islam participated in this study chosen through purposive sampling which is a type of non-probability sampling, based on inclusion-exclusion criteria prominently from Kerala. Informed consent will be collected from all participants before obtaining the data. Three questionnaires for measuring religiosity, susceptibility, and sense of belongingness were administered to the participants through google form and appropriate statistical tools was used for the analysis of data.

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### *Ethical Consideration*

- **Informed consent:** The subjects were given a brief idea about the questionnaire and the purpose for which it is administered.
- **Taking permission:** No questionnaire was administered without the full permission of the subject.
- **Maintaining confidentiality:** The details of the subject are kept confidential and it will only be used for academic purposes.
- Voluntary Participation was done and no one was pressurized for filling the questionnaire.
- The subjects have the freedom to quit the study at any point of time.
- Anonymity of individuals and organizations is ensured.

### *Data Analysis*

The Statistical Package of the Social Scientists (SPSS) for windows, Version 17.0, was utilized to analyse the quantitative data. Once the survey forms were received from the participants, the data was immediately coded and entered into SPSS. Descriptive Statistics was utilized to describe the sample characteristics and to evaluate whether the results were normally distributed. Spearman's correlation technique was used to determine the strength and direction of relationships among variables and regression analysis was done to predict and forecast the variation among the variables of religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belonging. Also, Cronbach's alpha was utilized to estimate the internal consistency of each of the three instruments.

**Table 4 Result of testing normal distribution of variables among Christians, Muslims and Hindus**

Variables	Religion	Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.
RELIGIOSITY	Christians	.979	110	.077
	Muslim	.980	109	.097
	Hindus	.926	155	.000*
SUGGESTIBILITY	Christians	.979	110	.081
	Muslim	.984	109	.225
	Hindus	.992	155	.559
SOB	Christians	.953	110	.001*
	Muslim	.959	109	.002*
	Hindus	.954	155	.000*

\*Significant at 0.01 level

The Shapiro-Wilk test of normal distribution of variables among Christians, Hindus and Muslims points out that, for Christianity the variables Religiosity ( $W=0.979$ ,  $p=0.77>0.05$ ) and Suggestibility ( $W=0.979$ ,  $p=.081>0.05$ ) is not significant and hence the data follows a normal distribution while for the variable Sense of Belongingness ( $W=0.953$ ,  $p=0.001<0.05$ ) is significant and does not follow a normal distribution. For Muslims, the variables Religiosity ( $W=.980$ ,  $p=.097>0.05$ ) and Suggestibility ( $W=0.984$ ,  $p=.225>0.05$ ) is not significant and hence the data follows a normal distribution while for the variable Sense of Belongingness ( $W=0.959$ ,  $p=0.002<0.05$ ) is significant and does not follow a normal distribution. For Hindus, the variable Suggestibility ( $W=0.926$ ,  $p=.559>0.05$ ) is not significant and hence the data follows a normal distribution while for the variables Sense of

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Belongingness ( $W=0.992$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ) and Religiosity ( $W=0.954$ ,  $p=0.000<0.05$ ) is significant and does not follow a normal distribution.

### RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter deals with the result and discussions of the data collected. The data is statistically analysed to interpret and discuss the results. The statistical methods are based on the objective of the study. The data is collected from 375 participants in total from three different religions of Christianity, Muslim and Hindu within Kerala. The objectives were 1) To find out the relationship between suggestibility and religiosity 2) To find out the relationship between need for belonging and religiosity, 3) To find out the extent of religiosity among three different religions: Hindus, Muslims and Christians.

Section 1 covers the correlation and regression analyses of the variables among Christians  
Section 2 covers the correlation and regression analyses of the variables among Muslims  
Section 3 covers the correlation and regression analyses of the variables among Hinduism  
Section 4 covers the discussion about the obtained results.

#### Section 1

**Table 5 Result of spearman's rank correlation among religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Christians.**

	Suggestibility	Sense of belongingness
Religiosity	.462**	.065
Suggestibility		.358**

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Spearman Rank Correlation of religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Christians suggest that there is a correlation between religiosity and suggestibility and between suggestibility and sense of belongingness significant at 0.01 level.

**Table 6 Result of regression analysis predicting suggestibility by religiosity among Christians.**

Variable	$\alpha$	SE	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Religiosity	44.42	0.86	0.462	5.418	0.000
Adjusted $R^2$	0.206				
$F$	29.352				
$p$	0.00				

The regression analysis shows that religiosity predicts 20% variation in suggestibility among Christians since  $\beta = 0.462$ ,  $t = 5.418$ ,  $p = 0.0005$  and  $F = 29.352$ ,  $p = 0.005$

#### Section 2

**Table 7 Result of spearman's rank correlation among religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Muslims.**

	Suggestibility	Sense of belongingness
Religiosity	.465**	.143*
Suggestibility		.399**

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).*

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Spearman Rank Correlation of religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Muslims suggest that there is a correlation between religiosity and suggestibility and between suggestibility and sense of belongingness significant at 0.01 level. It also points out a correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness significant at 0.05 level.

**Table 8 Result of regression analysis predicting suggestibility by religiosity among Muslims.**

Variable	$\alpha$	SE	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Religiosity	43.825	0.57	0.465	8.507	0.000
Adjusted $R^2$	0.213				
$F$	72.361				
$p$	0.020				

The regression analysis shows that religiosity predicts 21% variation in suggestibility among Muslims since  $\beta = 0.465$ ,  $t = 8.507$ ,  $p = 0.020$  and  $F = 72.361$

**Table 9 Result of regression analysis predicting sense of belongingness by religiosity among Muslims.**

Variable	$\alpha$	SE	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Religiosity	64.026	0.34	0.143	2.339	0.000
Adjusted $R^2$	0.17				
$F$	5.470				
$p$	0.20				

The regression analysis shows that religiosity predicts 17% variation in sense of belongingness among Muslims since  $\beta = 0.143$ ,  $t = 2.339$ ,  $p = 0.000$  and  $F = 5.470$

### Section 3

**Table 10 Result of spearman's rank correlation among religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Hindus**

	Suggestibility	Sense of belongingness
Religiosity	.188*	.083
Suggestibility		.407**

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Spearman Rank Correlation of religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Hindus suggest that there is a correlation between religiosity and suggestibility at 0.05 level and between suggestibility and sense of belongingness significant at 0.01 level.

**Table 11 Result of regression analysis predicting suggestibility by religiosity among Hindus.**

Variable	$\alpha$	SE	$\beta$	$t$	$p$
Religiosity	43.957	0.46	0.473	10.378	0.000
Adjusted $R^2$	0.222				
$F$	107.710				
$p$	0.00				

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The regression analysis shows that religiosity predicts 22% variation in suggestibility among Hindus since  $\beta = 0.462$ ,  $t = 5.418$ ,  $p = 0.0005$  and  $F = 29.352$ ,  $p = 0.005$

### Section 4

#### Discussion

The primary objectives of the study were 1) To find out the relationship between suggestibility and religiosity 2) To find out the relationship between need for belonging and religiosity, 3) To find out the extent of religiosity among three different religions: Hindus, Muslims and Christians. This study included 375 participants with 111 Christian's participants, 108 Muslim participants and 154 Hindu participants. The tools used for the study were 1) Sociodemographic sheet, 2) The Belief into Action Scale (Koenig, Wang, Zaben and Adi; 2015) 3) Multidimensional Iowa Short Suggestibility Scale (Kotov, Bellman & Watson; 2004) and 4) Sense of Belonging Instrument (Hegarty & Patusky, 1995). The data was collected using convenience sampling. Correlation between religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness was obtained through Spearman rank correlation followed by regression analysis across the three different religions and significant correlation was found between the variables.

The test for normality using Shapiro-Wilk test was done for all the three scales. For the first scale of religiosity the normality score for Christians was 0.077 with a normality score of 0.081 for suggestibility scale and 0.001 for sense of belongingness. While in the first two scales the data is normally distributed while for the third scale the data is not normally distributed, as it is significant as it falls below 0.05. To find the correlation between the various scales across the three different religions, Spearman's rank correlation was employed. Across Christians we find that there is a positive correlation between religiosity and suggestibility at 0.01 level which means that religiosity and suggestibility concord with each other. In Christians, we do not observe any significant correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness. We also observe that there is a positive correlation significant at 0.01 level between suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Christians. From Table 6, the regression analysis obtained suggests that religiosity predicts 20% variation in suggestibility among Christians. One possible explanation for such a result might be while the data was collected from different age groups, majority of the participants were students in CMI (Christian institutions) which has daily prayers and closely works with churches where students who practices Christianity would have to follow. A study was conducted in 2009 by Corneille and Cappellen, "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening: Religious priming activates submissive thoughts and behaviours". Two subsequent experiments were conducted to understand the association between religion, submissiveness and conformity. In the first experiment the individual's religion-submission association strength was tested using a lexical decision task. In experiment 2, the subjects were either primed with religious or neutral concepts and then and were invited or not by the experimenter to take revenge on someone who allegedly criticised them. In this experiment, religious priming increased the accessibility of submission-related concepts and the acceptance of a morally problematic request for revenge. This study concluded that religious priming activates submissive thoughts and behaviour. This result can be further extended to explain the correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness. In a study conducted by Chan, Michalak, Ybarra in 2018 "When God is your only Friend: Religious Beliefs Compensate for Purpose in Life in the Socially Disconnected" concluded that people who have high social connectedness, their purpose of life is driven by their social connection and religiosity played less factor while people who are socially disconnected and highly religious reported greater purpose in life compared to people who are socially disconnected and less religious.



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Since generally in college, students make friends and attain sense of belongingness, it is possible that they might have associated this with the religious aspect of their college which may explain the positive correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness.

Correspondingly, the normality score for Muslims on religiosity was 0.097 with a normality score of 0.225 for suggestibility scale and 0.002 for sense of belongingness. While in the first two scales the data is normally distributed while for the third scale the data the value falls under 0.05 which means it is not normally distributed, and is significant. Across Muslims we observe that there is a positive correlation between religiosity and suggestibility at 0.01 level which means that religiosity and suggestibility concord with each other. A correlation significant at 0.05 level between sense of belongingness and religiosity was observed among Muslims. Among Muslims, the regression analysis shows that religiosity predicts 21% variation in suggestibility. The regression analysis also shows that religiosity predicts 17% variation in sense of belongingness among Muslims. The population from which the data was collected was mainly among highly religious people who were part of community services and such as part of their religion. On the basis of the conclusion from the conducted in 2009 by Corneille and Cappellen, “Speak, Lord, your servant is listening: Religious priming activates submissive thoughts and behaviours” that religious priming activates submissive thoughts and behaviour, constant exposure to religious content is a possible explanation for the correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness and since through community service is possible that they achieve sense of belongingness which can explain the positive correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness. A study conducted by Aydin, Fischer and Frey (2010) ‘Turning to God in the face of ostracism: Effects of social exclusion on religiousness’ concluded that socially excluded people exhibited higher affiliation to religion, stronger intention to engage in religious behaviour reduced stress and aggression as a by-product of social rejection compared to other neutral individuals. Belief in religion was exhibited to be a powerful coping mechanism. Amidst the political tension against minorities prevalent in the country it is possible that some might have found turning into their religion as a coping mechanism which gave them a higher sense of belongingness when they feel excluded from the mainstream society. This can possibly explain the positive correlation between sense of belongingness and religiosity.

The normality score for Hindus was 0.000 with a normality score of 0.559 for suggestibility scale and 0.000 for sense of belongingness. The scales of religiosity and sense of belongingness were not normally distributed as the normality was significant which fell below 0.05. The scale of suggestibility for Hindus seems to be normally distributed as it falls above 0.05. In Hindus we obtained the data that there is positive correlation between religiosity and suggestibility at 0.05 level which demonstrates that religiosity and suggestibility go hand in hand. Finally, among Hindus, the regression analysis shows that religiosity predicts 22% variation in suggestibility. This study seems to be congruent to the previous studies findings such as a study conducted on 2011 in addition to this by Cappellen, Corneille, and Saroglou, on “Beyond mere compliance to authoritative figures: Religious priming increases conformity to informational influence among submissive people” in which the study concluded that religious priming increases conformity to informational influence which can be extended to show how suggestibility and religiosity is correlated especially when they are constantly fed that a threat exists against their religion. Furthermore, since the majority in Kerala practise Hinduism and are hence exposed to religious sacraments and information it is possible that they have developed a sense of belongingness which can explain the correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness.

## CONCLUSION

Here, summarizes the present study “Suggestibility and Sense of Belongingness among various groups in Kerala” which encapsulates the major findings, implications, limitations and conclusion of the study.

This study revolves around three key concepts of Religiosity, Suggestibility and Sense of belongingness. One of the most prominent definitions would be by Hakey and Sanders (2003) who define religiosity as a multi-layered concept involving cognitive, emotional, motivational, and behavioural aspects. According to the American Psychological Association (APA), suggestibility is defined as "an inclination to readily and uncritically adopt the ideas, beliefs, attitudes, or actions of others". Suggestibility maybe further divided into primary, secondary suggestibility or Tertiary suggestibility as proposed by Eysenck and Furneaux, (1945). This study primarily deals with tertiary suggestibility which is referred to as an easy, uncritical acceptance of a recommendation of someone else by an individual due to social pressure or prestige of person making a recommendation. Belonging usually refers to the acceptance of being a member or part of a group. Maslow (1943) proposed the need for belonging is essential and plays a significant role in motivation soon after psychological and safety needs. A study conducted among the Ivy Universities points out how religious fundamentalists are more susceptible to the news with no fact-value and this may be attributed to reduced engagement in open-minded and analytical thinking. (Bronstein, Pennycook, Bear, Rand, & Cannon, 2019). Research conducted by Gebauer and Maio, (2012) further strengthened this theory as their research concluded that the need for belongingness among several other factors caters to their motivation for belief in God. Religiosity is significantly correlated with physical and mental health, tolerance-social behaviour, and interpersonal relationships. (Tsang & McCullough, 2003). This current research aims to understand the association between suggestibility, sense of belongingness and religion across the three religions prevalent within Kerala: Hinduism, Islam and Christianity. Kerala being a state where different religions co-exist ranging from religion fundamentalists to atheists, this study will give shine light on the effect of religiosity across different culture.

### *Findings of the Study*

1. There is a positive correlation between religiosity and suggestibility among Christians
2. There is a positive correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Christians
3. There is no significant correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness among Christians
4. Religiosity predicts 20% variation in suggestibility among Christians
5. There is positive correlation between religiosity and suggestibility among Muslims
6. There is positive correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness among Muslims
7. There is positive correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Muslims.
8. Religiosity predicts 21% variation in suggestibility among Muslims
9. Religiosity predicts 17% variation in sense of belongingness among Muslims
10. There is positive correlation between religiosity and suggestibility among Hindus
11. There is positive correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness among Hindus
12. There is no significant correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness among Hindus
13. Religiosity predicts 22% variation in suggestibility among Hindus.

### *Limitations of the Study*

- The sample size is relatively smaller.
- Only the variable religion is considered and hence the influence of other variables such as age and gender on the subjects cannot be explained
- The study was conducted using convenience sampling within Kerala and hence it cannot be generalized to a much larger population.
- Social desirability could play a major role as affecting the results as the study uses self-made questionnaires

### *Implications of the Study*

- This study highlights the role of religion in human's wellbeing and how it correlates with suggestibility and innate need of sense of belongingness.
- This study highlights how people following different religions are impacted differently with subtle similarities.
- The findings will help mental health practitioners, NGO workers, HR managers among others on how religiosity influences a person and take steps accordingly.

### *Conclusion*

The study tried to answer the question whether there is a correlation between religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness among the three different religions of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam prevalent in Kerala. The study concluded that there is correlation between religiosity and suggestibility among all three religions. Correlation between suggestibility and sense of belongingness was also observed between all three religions. Correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness was observed among Muslims while no correlation between religiosity and sense of belongingness was observed among Christians and Hindus. Religiosity also predicts a variation of 20% suggestibility among Christians, 21% among Muslims and 22% among Hindus. Religiosity also predicts a 17% variation of sense of belongingness among Muslims. A better understanding of the relationship between religiosity, suggestibility and sense of belongingness helps HR managers, NGO workers and mental health practitioners to take active steps accordingly.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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