



CIPRIANI COLLEGE
OF LABOUR AND CO-OPERATIVE STUDIES



WORK MATTERS

AUGUST 2023

COLUMN

Religiosity and Safety in the Workplace

Religion and its abiding principle of believing in a higher being and its attendant principles and codes of conduction alignment with relevant scriptures has played a significant role in shaping the beliefs, values, and behaviors of individuals across cultures and societies. In recent years, there has been growing attention to the intersection of religiosity and safety in the workplace. The US Department of State notes that 97.8% of the population of Trinidad and Tobago (mid 2021) are religiously affiliated. Numerous studies show that religiosity is tied to a number of workers' outcomes.

Religiosity can be a positive influence in the workplace. Religious employees often hold strong ethical and moral values, which can translate into a higher level of integrity and accountability in their work. These employees are more likely to exhibit positive behaviors, such as treating coworkers with respect and kindness.

Religiosity often emphasizes compassion, empathy, and care for one another, values that can significantly impact workplace safety. Many religious scriptures stress the importance of caring for fellow human beings and fostering a harmonious community. In the Bible, the Golden Rule, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you" (Matthew 7:12), promotes empathy and respect, which can translate into employees looking out for each other's safety. Similarly, the Quran highlights the importance of mercy and kindness, encouraging believers to show concern for others (Quran 24:22). This can foster a work environment where individuals prioritize the safety and well-being of their colleagues. Moreover, religious teachings often advocate stewardship and responsibility for the environment and its resources. For instance, the Bible states that humans should be caretakers of the earth (Genesis 1:28), while the Quran emphasizes the notion of humans being vicegerents on Earth (Quran 2:30). Additionally, Hindus believe the earth to be a goddess or art of God which provides sustenance, and shelter as stated in the Veda "I am the son of the Earth, Earth is my mother" (Aharva- Veda 12.1.12.)

These principles can influence employees to practice environmental safety in the workplace, promoting responsible use of resources and reducing the risk of accidents or hazardous incidents. According to a study conducted in the United States in 2021 on local religiosity, workplace safety, and firm value, employees of establishments in more religious counties get less injured than those in less religious counties. A reduction in occupational accidents is more evident for establishments in counties dominated by one religious denomination.

The Occupational Safety and Health Act 2004 as amended is a comprehensive legislation that aims to ensure safe and healthy working conditions for employees. In the context of religiosity, OSH recognizes the importance of religious accommodation in the workplace. Employees should not face discrimination based on their religious beliefs, and employers are required to reasonably accommodate religious practices that do not pose an undue hardship on the business. For example, if an employee's religious attire, such as a hijab or religious garb, poses a safety risk in certain work conditions, employers must seek alternative ways to accommodate the employee's religious beliefs while still adhering to safety regulations. This balance ensures that religious practices are not compromised, and employees can work in a safe and inclusive environment.

During the holy month of Ramadan in Islam, fasting from sunrise to sunset is obligatory for devout Muslims. This practice could affect an employee's energy levels and concentration, especially in physically demanding jobs or those involving heavy machinery. Employers can address this concern by scheduling demanding tasks during non-fasting hours or providing flexible working arrangements during Ramadan to ensure employees can observe their faith while maintaining safety standards. Similarly, the Bible instructs believers to observe the Sabbath day and keep it holy (Exodus 20:8). For some individuals, this means refraining from work on certain days. In workplaces where continuous operations are essential, employers

can explore alternatives such as shift adjustments or rotating schedules to accommodate religious observances without compromising safety. Additionally, religiosity often intersects with cultural diversity in the workplace. Embracing this diversity can lead to better safety outcomes. Companies that recognize and respect the religious beliefs and practices of their employees foster an atmosphere of understanding and collaboration.

To address the potential conflicts between religiosity and workplace safety, employers can implement policies that protect employees' right to religious expression while upholding workplace safety and non-discrimination policies. These policies can include providing reasonable accommodations for religious practices that do not conflict with workplace safety regulations, such as allowing employees to take breaks for prayer or meditation. Additionally, employers can provide training and education for employees to raise awareness of diversity and inclusivity in the workplace, which can reduce discriminatory behaviors and promote a safer and more harmonious work environment. The relationship between religiosity and safety in the workplace is a multifaceted and delicate one. By drawing examples from sacred texts like the Bible, Vedas, and Quran, along with provisions from the Occupational Safety and Health Act of Trinidad and Tobago, we can better understand how religious beliefs, principles, and practices can influence workplace safety positively.

Zaheer Hoosaney
Lecturer
OSHE Department
CCLCS