

Perception of Islam Among Non-Muslim Undergraduates in Universiti Tunku Abdul Rahman

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ABSTRACT

Islam is the religion of the Muslims revealed through Muhammad as the Prophet of Allah in 7th-century. Despite being known as a religion that promotes moderation and goodness, Islam is always associated with extremist. Islamophobia, the fear, hatred of, or prejudice against, the Islamic religion or Muslims generally, has become prevalent. Its presence in Malaysia would jeopardise the unity, harmony and uniqueness of Malaysia that is well known for her multiracial aspect. This preliminary study aims to explore the perception of non-Muslim undergraduates in a private university in Malaysia towards Islam. It is essential to identify whether there is a manifestation of fear, hatred of or prejudice against Islam or the Muslims. 16 students were chosen based on convenient sampling and divided into 2 main focused groups which are categorized based on the type of primary education; main stream or vernacular. The sample is represented by 4 female Indian students, 4 male Indian students, 4 female Chinese students and 4 male Chinese students. The study deployed focused group interview where the students' knowledge and opinion on Islam and Muslims were probed from series of open-ended questions. Their answers were recorded and transcribed. Thematic analysis was utilized as to detect factors that are pertinent to the possibility of formation of Islamophobia. The findings revealed that there were more interaction with the Muslims in the main stream focused group compared to the vernacular focused group. Hence, the interaction has created more awareness and knowledge regarding Islam which resulted in non-existence of Islamophobia among the students in this focused group. There was little fear, hatred of or prejudice against Muslims in vernacular focused group especially when dealing with conversion of religion. The fact that having little knowledge about the religion has made this focused group to treat religion as a sensitive issue and would not dwell into it. Media exposure was identified as the culprit of Islamophobia. The increasing contact with the Muslims and more knowledge on Islam create positive outlook of Islam and Muslims. This study has suggested that there is a need to have the knowledge on Islam as to create respectful and tolerable individuals which leads to a harmonious world.