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# Should Social Marketing Interventions Against Human Trafficking in Asia Focus on Religion or Economics?

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## Abstract

Data from Gallup polls and the U.S. Department of State indicate that nations that score high in religiosity may or may not have strongly opposed human trafficking. However, nations that are low in religiosity have consistently opposed human trafficking. In this article, we investigate relationships between religiosity, religion, and poverty in nineteen Asian countries. The purpose is to identify opportunities to use either economic aid or religion-based social marketing appeals to oppose trafficking. A Spearman's rho correlation indicated a statistically significant relationship between poverty and religiosity. Religiosity was significantly positively related to the percentage of Muslims in the country and significantly negatively related to the percentage of members of "Other" religions. Overall, the most attractive segments for religion-based social marketing appeals were Hindus and Muslims.

The Trafficking Victims Protection Act (U.S. Congress 2000) describes human trafficking as the movement of a person from one location to another and the forcible utilization of the person's services with the intention of financial gain from his or her person or labor. Human trafficking is also defined as the recruitment, transportation, harboring, or receiving of a person through force in order to exploit him or her for prostitution, forced labor, debt bondage, or organ harvesting (United Nations 2000). Victims may be forced to work long hours in dangerous conditions under the threat of violence for little or no pay. Many are forced into the commercial sex industry. For instance, there is a thriving market in trafficked brides in China stemming from national family-planning policies (Thomas 2011).

### *RELIGION AND SOCIAL MARKETING*

Antitrafficking interventions target victims, potential victims, consumers (e.g., of prostitution), traffickers, and distributors of trafficking-related goods and services. For instance, the California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (State of California 2010) facilitates the identification of slavery-related products. Globally, antitrafficking efforts have had relatively little impact. Accordingly, perhaps religion-based social marketing efforts may contribute. Kotler, Roberto, and Lee (2002:5) defined social marketing as "the use of marketing principles and techniques to influence a target audience to voluntarily accept, reject, modify or abandon a behavior for the benefit of individuals, groups or society as a whole."

Anecdotally, religion-based social marketing may have influenced the cessation of the African slave trade in the United States. *Uncle Tom's Cabin* appears to have engendered sympathy for enslaved black Christians (Boots 2010). Moreover, a former trafficker wrote a religious hymn that may have discouraged slavery (Christianity Today 2014). The Quaker abolitionist movement against African slavery is another example of religion-based intervention (Public Broadcasting System 2003). In recent times, Catholic Charities, International Justice Mission, and other religious organizations have opposed human trafficking. They free slaves, care for them, and appeal to governments on their behalf. Coercive influence strategies (Frazier and Sheth 1985) via legal systems appear to be the most common intervention against traffickers. However, human trafficking remains a global epidemic.

A relatively untested intervention against modern human trafficking would entail using religious appeals to dissuade traffickers from practicing aspects of trafficking. For instance, religion-based attitude change could perhaps cause a trafficker to use less exploitive methods, traffic fewer people, or cease trafficking. However, followers of a given religion may have opposing attitudes toward human trafficking. For instance, in the nineteenth century, self-identified Christians both opposed African slavery and supported it (Douglass 1845:15).

## *PURPOSE*

Because religion offers moral codes and social networks for idea dissemination, it can provide the basis for antitrafficking social marketing campaigns. Accordingly, this study attempted to find links between human trafficking and religion. Specifically, we computed correlations between the percentage of followers in each Asian country's religions and its human trafficking scores. The goal was to determine which religions' percentages of followers correlate more or less closely with human trafficking. We also correlated human trafficking scores and religion percentages with each nation's religiosity scores and poverty rates to estimate the efficacy of religion-based versus economic-based appeals. For instance, a nation with a high percentage of members of a given religion would not be an attractive target for a religion-based appeal if the members are not religious. However, economic incentives may work in such cases.

## *ASIA*

According to the United Nations, Eastern Asia includes the People's Republic of China, Japan, Hong Kong, North Korea, South Korea, Mongolia, and Taiwan. Southeast Asia includes Brunei, Myanmar (Burma), Cambodia, East Timor, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. Southern Asia includes Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka. We included nineteen of those nations in our study because they shared geographical proximity and cultural similarities. North Korea, Bhutan, Brunei, and East Timor were excluded for lack of religiosity data. Mongolia and Afghanistan were excluded because they are culturally closer to the Silk Road nations.

## *RELIGIOSITY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING*

In 2006, 2007, and 2008, the Gallup organization sampled people in 143 countries and territories to determine whether religion was an important part of their daily lives (Gallup 2009). We used Gallup's religiosity measure in our study to help determine whether religious antitrafficking appeals would be more effective in more religious nations. However, since the more religious nations tend to be more impoverished (Pew Research Center 2007), perhaps poverty, not religion, is the crucial factor underlying trafficking. In those nations, religion-based antitrafficking campaigns would probably fail. Murray, Dingman, Kochanowski, Porter, and Otte (2011) found that nations scoring high in religiosity were either high or low in their efforts to combat human trafficking. However, the least religious nations scored consistently high in combating trafficking.

### *RELIGION AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING IN ASIA*

Western nations and their colonies have been influenced predominantly by Christianity, while the Indian subcontinent has been influenced predominantly by Hinduism. Buddhism, which originated in India, spread east, influencing Asia. Islam spread across the Eastern Hemisphere through much of the region that is sometimes referred to as the 10/40 Window, meaning 10 degrees south and 40 degrees north latitude. It encompasses territory that formerly belonged to Islamic empires.

To investigate the relationship between poverty, religion, religiosity, and national efforts to combat human trafficking in Asia, we computed Spearman's rho correlations for each of the nineteen Asian nations for (1) percentage of adherents to Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and/or "Other" (other religions such as Taoism, Shintoism, or Animism); (2) religiosity (Gallup 2009); (3) percentage of the population living below the nation's poverty level; and (4) the nation's U.S. "Trafficking in Persons Report" score.

### *SAMPLE DESIGN*

We used the *World Fact Book* (Central Intelligence Agency 2010) to identify each nation's percentages of adherents to particular religions and the percentage living below its national poverty line. The source for religiosity data was Gallup's (2009) *Importance of Religion by Country Study*, which was based on telephone and face-to-face interviews conducted in 2006, 2007, and 2008 with approximately 1,000 adults in each country. Results per country have an associated sampling error of  $\pm 4$  percentage points. A nation's religiosity percentage was measured by respondents' affirmation that "religion is an important part of my daily life." Because the Gallup poll on religiosity surveyed 1,000 people per country, any differences between sample statistics and population parameters are presumed to be minimal. Gallup used five categories for religion: Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu and Other.

The "Trafficking in Persons Report" (TIP), published annually by the U.S. Department of State, scores nations on the basis of their efforts to combat human trafficking. Tier 1 governments fully comply with the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act's minimum standards. Tier 2 governments do not fully comply with the act's minimum standards but are making significant efforts to comply. Tier 2 "watch list" nations are "making significant efforts to comply with the standards and have significant numbers of victims, increasing numbers of victims, have failed to provide evidence of increasing efforts to combat trafficking from the prior year, and failed to honor commitments made the previous year to combat trafficking." Tier 3 countries do not comply with the act's minimum

standards and are not making significant efforts to do so. Table 1 lists TIP scores for the nineteen countries in our study.

**Table 1: U.S. Department of State “Trafficking in Persons Report” (TIP) Scores**

Nation	TIP Score*	Nation	TIP Score
Bangladesh	2	Nepal	2
Cambodia	2WL	Pakistan	2
China	3	Philippines	2
Hong Kong	2	Singapore	2
India	2	South Korea	1
Indonesia	2	Sri Lanka	2WL
Japan	2	Taiwan	1
Laos	2	Thailand	2WL
Malaysia	2WL	Vietnam	2
Myanmar (Burma)	2WL		

\*TIP score range: Tier 1, Tier 2, Tier 2 Watch List (2WL), and Tier 3.

A relatively large sample is required to achieve statistical significance when an effect is weak, and Asia has a finite number of nations. Therefore our sample (or population) size cannot be increased for additional power. However, effects that fail to achieve statistical significance because of sample size limitations may still offer insights for social marketing purposes.

## RESULTS

Spearman’s rho shows the relationship between two variables described by a monotonic function. It is less restrictive than a linear function as required for Pearson’s product moment correlations (Caruso and Norman 1997). We used Spearman’s rho to assess the strength of the relationship between ordinal TIP scores and other variables.

Since the major religions teach kindness, one might expect religious nations to score higher on anti-human-trafficking measures than do their less religious counterparts. However, this was not the case for our targeted Asian nations. Religiosity and TIP scores were weakly correlated (Spearman’s rho = 0.076). If we extend the threshold of statistical significance to 0.10, Spearman’s rho revealed a statistically significant relationship between poverty and religiosity ( $R^2 = 0.41$ ,  $p = 0.08$ ). This is consistent with the finding of the 2007 Pew study that religion and poverty generally move in tandem.

Religiosity was significantly positively correlated with the national percentage of Muslims ( $R^2 = 0.59$ ,  $p = 0.01$ ) and negatively correlated with the percentage of members of Other religions ( $R^2 = -0.79$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). In other words, nations tend to be more religious when the Islamic percentage is higher and less religious when there is a higher percentage of members of Other religions. Table 2 shows the relationships between TIP scores, the percentage of people living below poverty, and religiosity in these nations.

**Table 2: Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Human Trafficking, Poverty Rate, and Religiosity**

	Human Trafficking Score	Percentage Below Poverty
<b>Human Trafficking Score</b>	Correlation	
	Significance (two-tailed)	
	<i>N</i>	
<b>Percentage Below Poverty</b>	Correlation	0.01
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.98
	<i>N</i>	18
<b>Religiosity</b>	Correlation	0.08
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.76
	<i>N</i>	18
		0.41
		0.08*
		19

\* Significant at the 0.10 level.

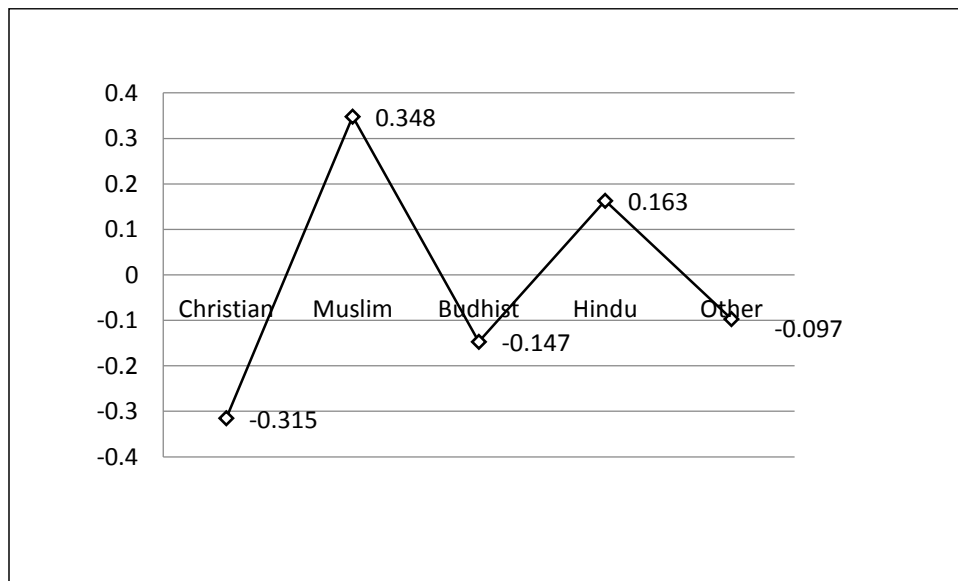
Table 3 shows the relationship between religion percentages, TIP scores, percentage of people living below poverty, and religiosity. The strongest negative correlation emerged for Christianity ( $-0.32$ ), indicating that a higher percentage of Christians in a nation correlates with a more favorable TIP report score. This is followed by Buddhism (0.15). The percentage practicing Islam was positively correlated with a poorer TIP score (0.35), followed by Hinduism (0.16). Thus Asian countries with higher percentages of Muslim and Hindu populations tend to have more human trafficking. This means that Muslims and Hindus are more likely to be victims, traffickers, or both. These results do not indicate a causal relationship between religion and human trafficking. Figure 1 graphs the correlations between religion percentages and human trafficking scores by religion.

**Table 3: Spearman's Rho Correlations Between Religiosity, Human Trafficking and Poverty Rate by Religion**

		Religiosity	Trafficking Score	Percentage Below Poverty
<b>Percentage Christian</b>	Correlation	-0.12	-0.32	-0.34
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.64	0.20	0.15
	<i>N</i>	19	18	19
<b>Percentage Muslim</b>	Correlation	0.59	0.35	0.06
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.01*	0.17	0.81
	<i>N</i>	18	17	18
<b>Percentage Buddhist</b>	Correlation	-0.06	-0.15	-0.12
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.81	0.56	0.62
	<i>N</i>	19	16	19
<b>Percentage Hindu</b>	Correlation	0.25	0.16	0.05
	Significance(two-tailed)	0.39	0.43	0.84
	<i>N</i>	17	16	17
<b>Percentage Other religion</b>	Correlation	-0.79	-0.10	-0.26
	Significance (two-tailed)	0.001**	0.70	0.29
	<i>N</i>	19	18	19

\* Significant at the 0.05 level; \*\* significant at the 0.01 level.

**Figure 1: Correlations Between Human Trafficking and Religion Percentage**



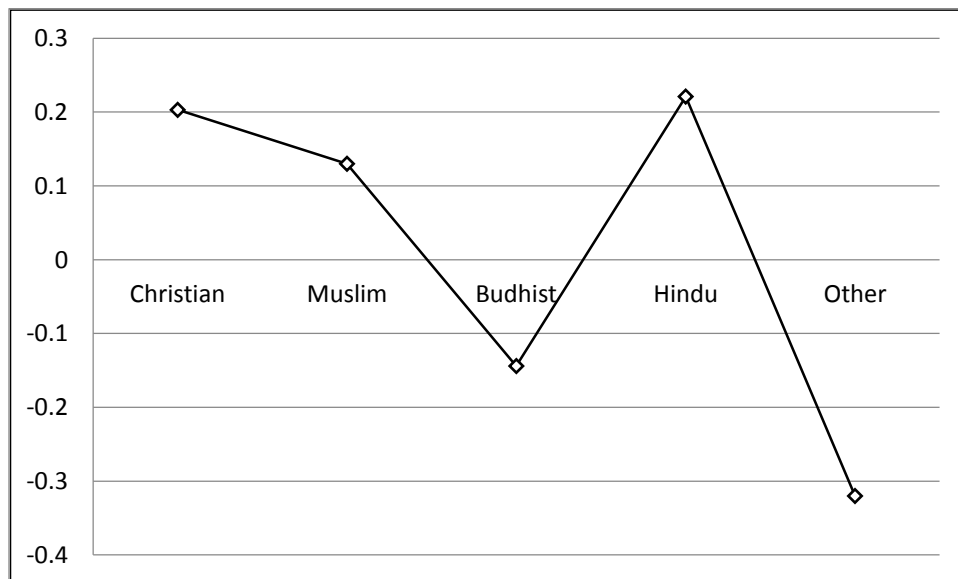


A possible reason for the difference between results for Christianity and Islam may be that these religions have different histories and trajectories. Christianity was strongly associated with the transatlantic slave trade and its abolition. Islam may follow a similar path if increased outcry among Muslims against human trafficking renders it less socially acceptable. The United Nation's *Combating Trafficking in Persons in Accordance with the Principles of Islamic Law* (2010), which is based on the Quran's encouragement to free slaves (verse 177, chapter 2), presents the work of Islamic scholars who call for justice, mercy, and kindness in human-trafficking settings.

### POVERTY AND HUMAN TRAFFICKING

The factor underlying trafficking may be economic rather than religious. If a given religion's followers are poorer than the followers of other faiths, then perhaps poverty leads them to take trafficking-related employment risks. For instance, Kara (2009) found that poor people may enlist traffickers to help them secure jobs. Our results indicate that in Asia, the correlation between human-trafficking scores and poverty is essentially zero (0.007). Figure 2 shows the correlations between poverty and religion percentage. The greater the percentage of Buddhists and members of Other religions, the lower the percentage of people below the national poverty line. However, the greater the percentage of Christians, Muslims and Hindus, the greater the level of poverty.

Figure 2: Correlations Between Poverty and Religion Percentage

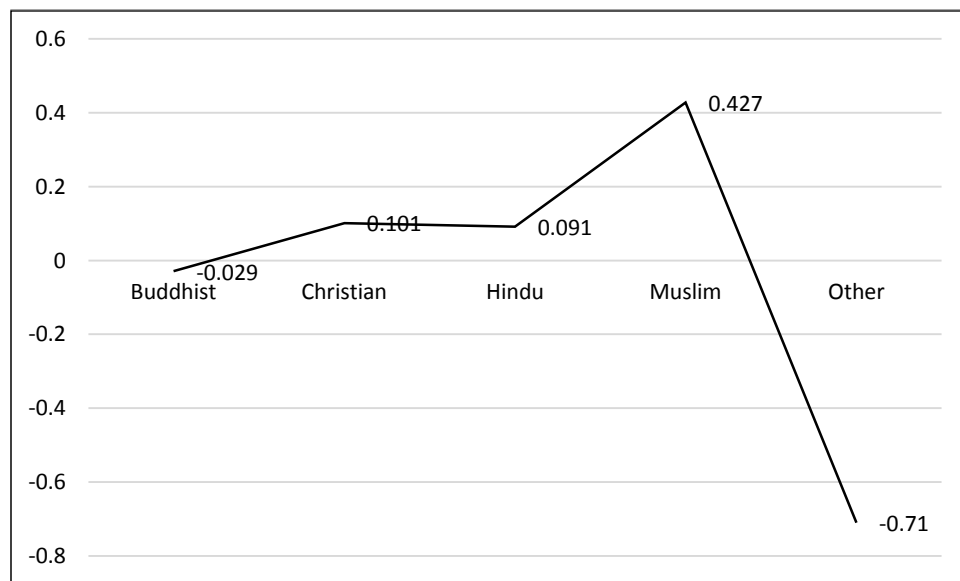


TIP scores do not indicate how victims became trafficked. In some instances, they were abducted; in others, they agreed to the exploitative arrangement for lack of a better option. This is consistent with Murray, Dingman, Porter, and Otte's (2015) suggestion that not all trafficking is involuntary. Sometimes the trafficker is essentially a job agent. This concept is supported by Weitzer (2014) and Jacobsen and Skilbrei (2010), who indicated that the variety of traffickers ranges from cab drivers to relatives. Thus it is difficult to determine the percentage of trafficking victims who were driven into it by poverty or for some other reason. Accordingly, economically based antitrafficking social marketing interventions in Asia are unlikely to be effective.

### *SOCIAL MARKETING IMPLICATIONS: RELIGIOSITY*

Although the major religions typically promote kindness, their adherents vary in religious devotion. Therefore the efficacy of religion-based antitrafficking appeals may vary as well. For instance, devout (high religiosity percentage) nations may be expected to respond more favorably to religion-based appeals than would nations with low religiosity. Figure 3 presents the correlations between religiosity and religion percentage.

**Figure 3: Correlations Between Religiosity and Religion Percentage**



Here, we found that the correlation between religiosity and Other religions, was significantly negative (0.71). Buddhism was not correlated with religiosity (-0.029). Christianity and Hinduism had very weak correlations with religiosity

(0.10 and 0.09, respectively). Islam showed the highest positive correlation with religiosity in these Asian nations (0.43). Therefore, religion-based human trafficking interventions in Asia should focus primarily on Islam with some focus on Christianity, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Campaigns that target members of Other religions should be given low priority.

Muslims are more likely to affirm practicing their religion on a daily basis, but this apparently does not lead to effective national efforts to combat human trafficking. Perhaps Asian Christians are more influenced by Western culture, which opposes human trafficking, while Asian Muslims are influenced by Arab culture, which anecdotally appears to be more tolerant of it.

Modern-day human trafficking exists on a continuum (Murray et al. 2015), and religious leaders may use social-marketing interventions to oppose its severe, milder, or least abusive forms. For instance, an antitrafficking campaign may help a Nepalese woman avoid abusive factory work (Simkhada 2008). In more severe instances, a campaign may raise funds to free debt-bondage victims or rescue abductees from brothels. However, the efficacy of such campaigns will presumably vary by religion and followers' religiosity. Accordingly, the following lists prescribe intervention strategies for each of the four quadrants formed by: (1) high and low levels of religiosity correlations by religion, and (2) high and low correlations between each religion and human trafficking scores:

**Devout traffickers (quadrant 1):** These are highly religious and highly involved in human trafficking. Strong culturally and religiously appropriate appeals should be effective at changing behavior here. In Asia, Muslims and Hindus fall into this category. Therefore persuasive antitrafficking messages delivered to Muslims and Hindus by appropriate religious leaders would be expected to decrease human trafficking.

**Devout nontraffickers (quadrant 2):** These are highly religious. However, they do not engage in human trafficking. Followers in these religions should be monitored for changes in trafficking behavior. Christians in Asia, and to some extent, Buddhists fall into this category. They may avoid human trafficking for religious or cultural reasons, or because an opposing religion has already laid claim to the most attractive industry segments.

**Secular nontraffickers (quadrant 3):** These have little interest in religion and do not engage in human trafficking. Presumably, they have better ways of earning incomes. In Asia, this segment would include some members of Other religions and some Buddhists.

**Secular traffickers (quadrant 4):** These would not respond to religion-based antitrafficking appeals. Religion is not important to them. Currently in Asia, a small percentage of Hindus fall into this category.

*A RELIGION-BASED INTERVENTION MATRIX*

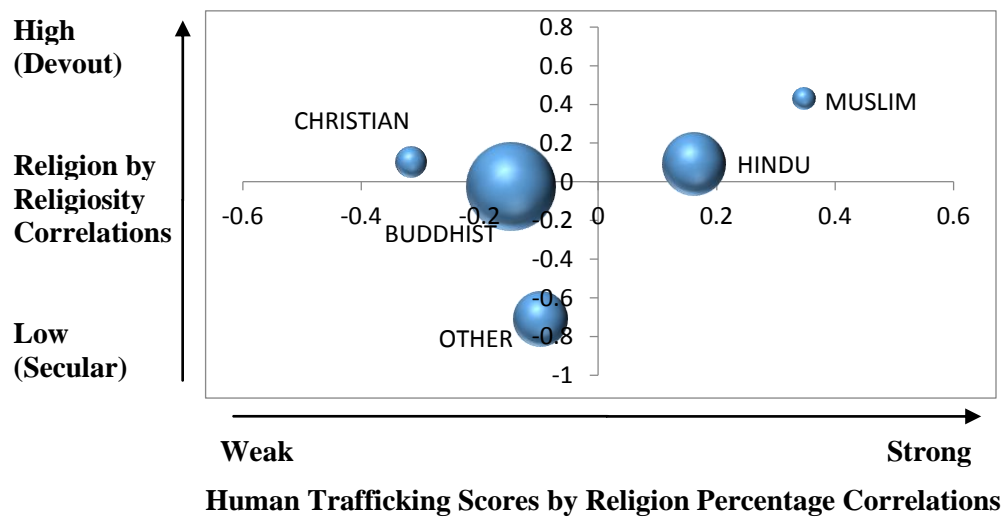
Categorizing religions as being more or less associated with trafficking and more or less devout enables us to identify nations where there are devout traffickers. These nations would be the most promising segments for religion-based anti-trafficking campaigns.

In nations that are lower in religiosity, traffickers would be unlikely to change behavior because of a religious appeal. Thus the benefit of religious appeals in the remaining sectors of devotion and trafficking would be lower. In the area of religion, however, social marketers must assess the value of targeting religious minorities, as such groups may grow in influence.

We constructed a  $2 \times 2$  decision matrix, analogous to the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) growth-share matrix, to analyze these data. The BCG model indicates conditions under which it is typically more beneficial to build, hold, harvest, or divest a venture. To build means to invest additional resources to grow the venture. To hold is akin to treading water, more resources being invested to maintain the venture's current position. To harvest is to stop investing and thereby let the venture ultimately fail. To divest means to sell the venture. However, the BCG application in this discussion is not meant to imply religious social engineering.

The *x*-axis in Figure 4 shows the correlation between percentage of people in each religion by nation and the nation's TIP score. Thus it is a proxy measure of how closely each religion is associated with trafficking. The *y*-axis shows the correlation between percentage of people in each religion and religiosity. The *z*-axis (indicated by the sizes of the spheres) represents the relative size of each religion.

**Figure 4: Categories of Religion by Religiosity and Human Trafficking Behavior in Asia**



## SUMMARY

Religiosity is relatively unrelated to human trafficking in Asia, while percentages of followers of a religion are related. In Asia, higher percentages of Christians, Buddhists, and members of Other religions generally mean less trafficking, while higher percentages of Muslims and Hindus generally mean more trafficking. Across Asia, poverty is not related to human trafficking except when there are high percentages of Hindus and Buddhists. This relationship did not emerge for Muslims, Christians, and members of Other religions. Combating human trafficking among Hindus and Buddhists may require economic development; this would be less essential for adherents of Islam, Christianity, and Other religions.

The results of this study suggest that religion-specific social marketing appeals against human trafficking may effectively combat trafficking in Asia. However, economic interventions are less likely to meet with success, as there is little correlation at the macro level between human trafficking and poverty.

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