



## Religion and Attitudes towards LGBT in Malaysia

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**Abstract:** *In Malaysia, LGBT is a punishable crime not only under the Syariah law but also under the penal laws. The present study examined how religion shapes attitudes towards LGBT among Malaysians, focusing in particular on their rationalisation for accepting or rejecting LGBT. In-depth interviews were conducted with 12 participants from different religious backgrounds and the data were analysed thematically. The results of the study showed that a majority of Muslims and Christians rejected LGBT on religious grounds. The findings also revealed three rationalisations of Muslims and Christians rejecting LGBT. (1) LGBT goes against the teaching of God. It is viewed as a sin and this religious belief should be passed down to the next generation. (2) LGBT is morally wrong. (3) LGBT is physically wrong as they believed God creates male and female to produce offspring. Some participants acknowledged that Christians should be compassionate to LGBT individuals by giving moral support to them. However, one Buddhist participant rationalised accepting LGBT on the ground that love is a core Buddhist teaching. The admonition of Buddha is not to harm others through sexuality. The study identified religious beliefs as one of the main influences people rejected LGBT culture but accepted LGBT individuals on the basis that they were human beings who deserved to be respected too.*

**Keywords:** religion, LGBT, attitudes, rationalisation

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### 1. Introduction

In this digital era, lesbian, gay bisexual and transgender (LGBT) has come into the public consciousness of Malaysians more than ever. Present day Malaysians, especially the younger generation, are more exposed and informed about LGBT culture with easy accessibility of media. At the same time Malaysian authorities are also becoming more public and vigilant in addressing homosexuality through secular and Sharia laws. Malaysia is an Islamic country that prohibits LGBT. All individuals who are involved in any unnatural sexual relationship will be fined, imprisoned and caned according to the civil law (Hamidah, 2004). Same-sex marriage (Reuters, 2018), anti-discrimination laws for homosexuality (Mokhtar, Wan Sukeri, & Latiff, 2019) and any deviant thoughts such as liberalism and pluralism (Malaysiakini, June 26, 2012) are not acceptable. The latest denouncement of LGBT rights in Malaysia was made by Datuk Ahmad Marzuk Shaary, Deputy Minister in the Prime Minister's department (religious affairs) who warned the public that harsher and stricter punishment will be imposed on LGBT community and amendment will be made on the existing Syariah Courts Act of 1965 or Act 355 if the need arises (Banerjee, 2019).

LGBT is a controversial issue in Malaysia. There exists both support (Mohd & Radzuwan, 2016; Ng, 2018) and discrimination against LGBT (Ayamany, 2021; Kaos, 2018). Some of the prominent