Generational Differences in Altruistic Concern among Seventh-day Adventists in Different Majority Religious Contexts

A Cross-Regional Analysis in the Context of Theodicy

AH Rosario, CT Aguillon, JV Adil, RG Opao, SB Opao
Presented by Alged Galleto

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AHSRA
adventist human-subject researchers association

Southern Asia-Pacific Division Country Composition

Religious Majority

Religious majority groupings were based on data for 2020 from Pew Research Center (2022):

Buddhist-majority: Cambodia 96.8%; Laos 64.0%; Myanmar 79.8%; Sri Lanka 68.6%; Thailand 92.6%.

Christian-majority: Philippines 92.4%; Timor-Leste 99.6%.

Muslim-majority: Bangladesh 90.8%; Indonesia 87.0%; Malaysia 66.1%; Pakistan 96.5%.

The following were excluded due to absence of a majority:

Singapore: 32.2% Buddhists, 17.7% Christians, 16.5% Unaffiliated, 16.1% Muslims.
Vietnam: 45.0% Folk Religion, 29.9% Unaffiliated, 16.2% Buddhists, 8.4% Christians.

Research Question

Within each generation (pre-millennials, millennials, post-millennials), is there a significant difference between church members residing in (a) Buddhist-majority, (b) Christian-majority, and (c) Muslim-majority countries in the frequency of agreement with the statement:

"I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world"?

Sampling

Stratified Random Multistage Cluster Sampling was utilized, with the conferences or missions serving as strata, such that each one was represented; and the churches as clusters, where at most 5 churches were randomly chosen per conference/mission at the first stage, and all willing church members were included as participants, given the absence of a sampling frame, at the second stage.

Sample size: 6497

Location: church members residing in the Southern Asia-Pacific Division, comprising 11 countries
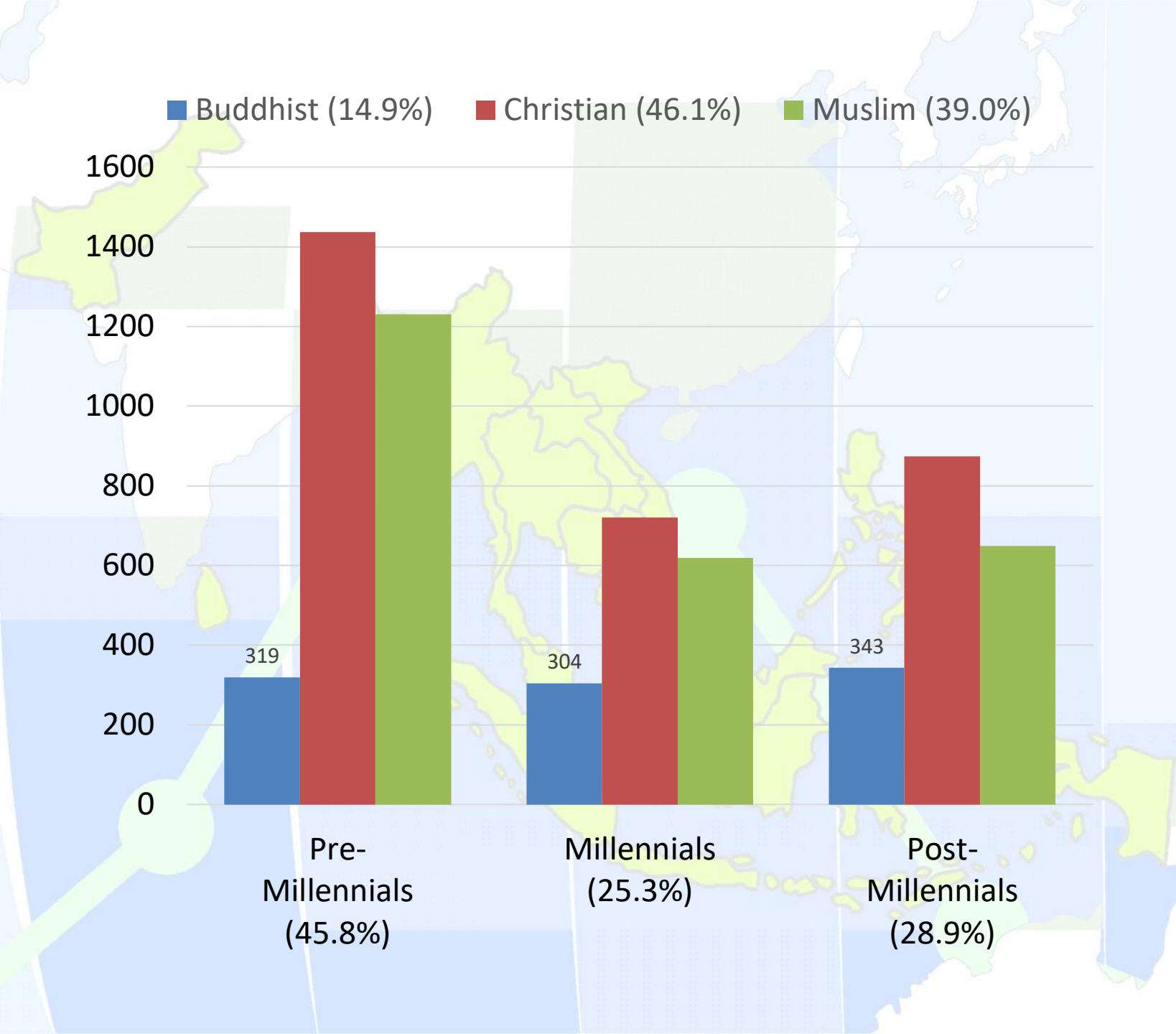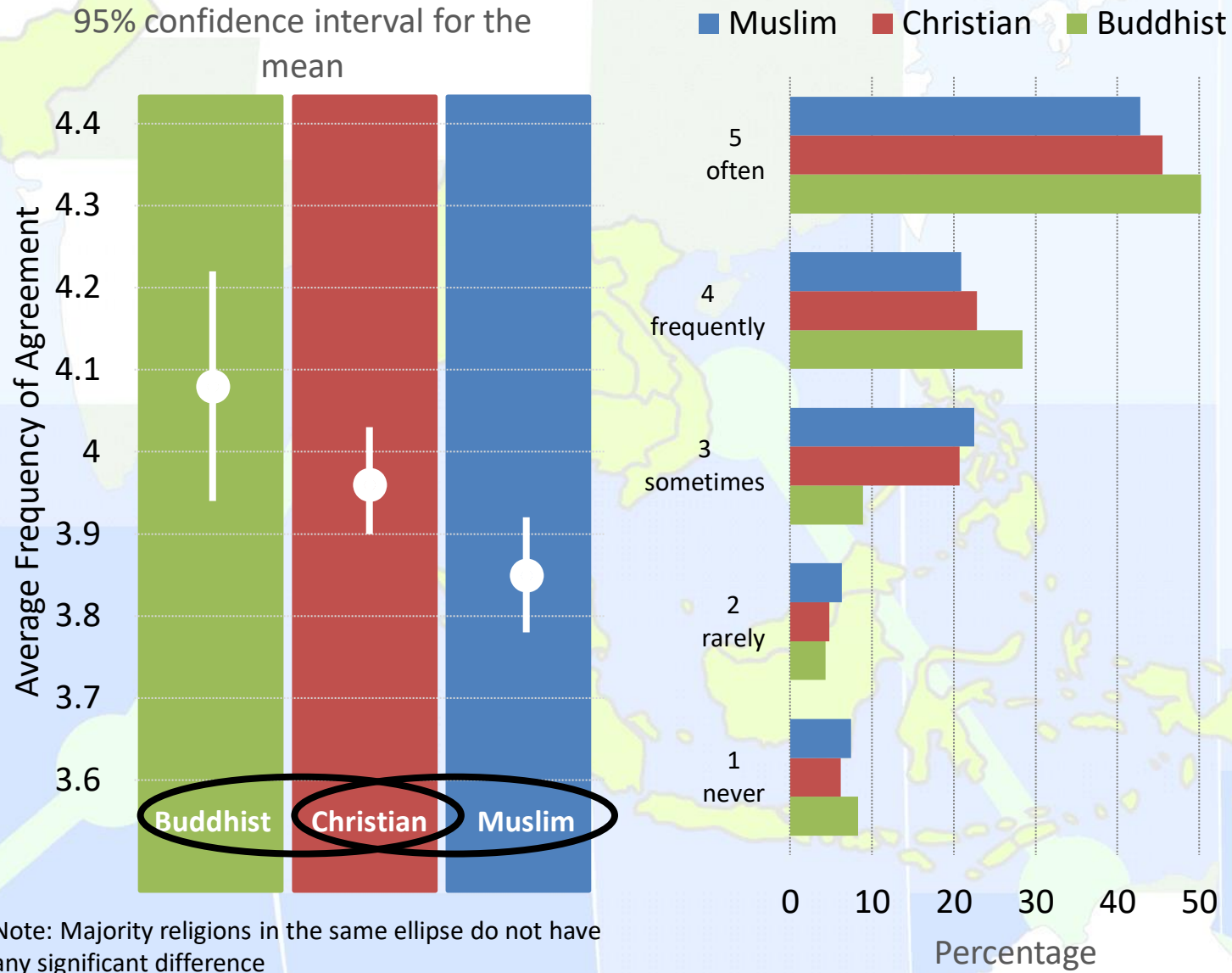
Generation versus Religious Majority in the **Southern Asia-Pacific Division**

I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.

95% confidence interval for the mean

Average Frequency of Agreement

Buddhist   Christian   Muslim

Note: Majority religions in the same ellipse do not have any significant difference

Muslim   Christian   Buddhist

5 often
4 frequently
3 sometimes
2 rarely
1 never

0   10   20   30   40   50

Percentage

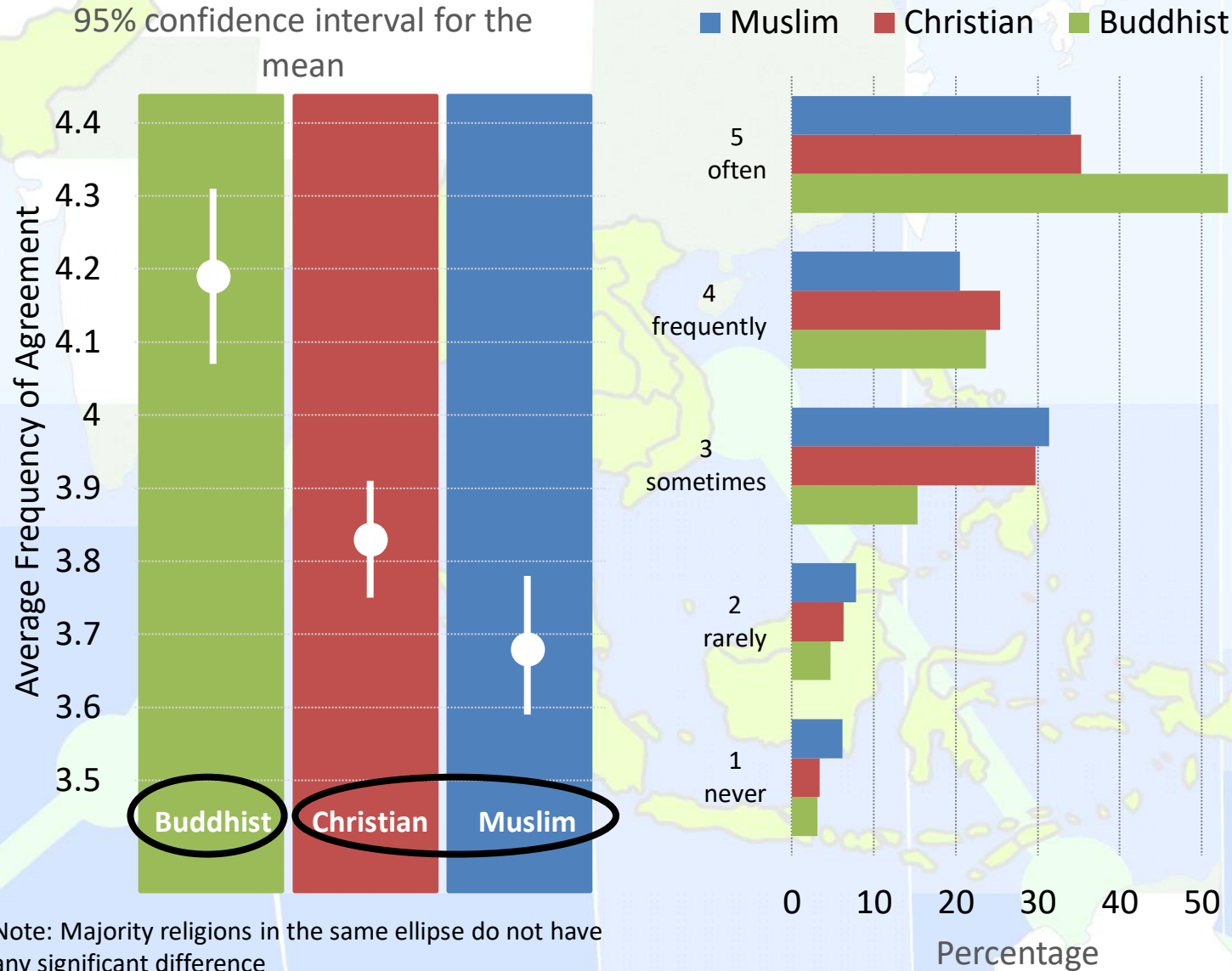## Findings for pre-millennials

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a highly significant difference (p = 0.002) among groups while pairwise comparisons using Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests, with Bonferroni corrections, identified the difference as occurring between respondents from Buddhist- and Muslim-majority countries of residence.

Note: Deviation from normality was slight, hence the use of parametric metrics for visualizations for the non-parametric results, as non-parametric metrics were more or less equal.

I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.

95% confidence interval for the mean

■ Muslim ■ Christian ■ Buddhist

Average Frequency of Agreement

Buddhist Christian Muslim

Note: Majority religions in the same ellipse do not have any significant difference

5 often
4 frequently
3 sometimes
2 rarely
1 never

0 10 20 30 40 50

Percentage

Findings for
millennials

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a highly significant difference ($p < 0.001$) among groups while pairwise comparisons using Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests, with Bonferroni correction, identified no difference between respondents from Christian- and Muslim-majority countries of residence.

Note: Deviation from normality was slight, hence the use of parametric metrics for visualizations for the non-parametric results, as non-parametric metrics were more or less equal.

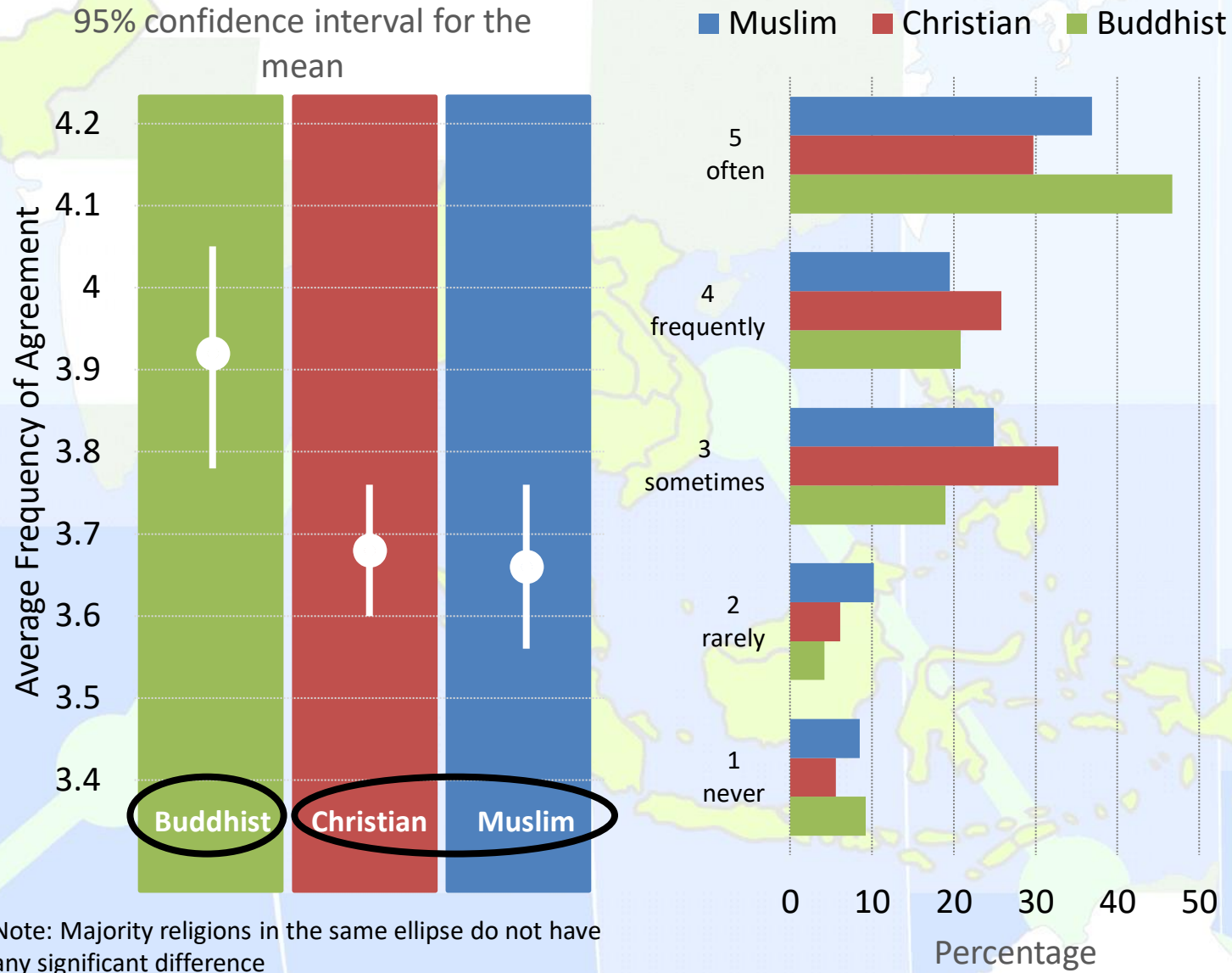I feel a deep sense of responsibility for reducing pain and suffering in the world.

95% confidence interval for the mean

Average Frequency of Agreement

Buddhist   Christian   Muslim

Note: Majority religions in the same ellipse do not have any significant difference

Muslim   Christian   Buddhist

5 often
4 frequently
3 sometimes
2 rarely
1 never

Percentage

Findings for post-millennials

The Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a highly significant difference (p < 0.001) among groups while pairwise comparisons using Mann-Whitney-Wilcoxon tests, with Bonferroni correction, identified no difference between respondents from Christian- and Muslim-majority countries of residence.

Note: Deviation from normality was slight, hence the use of parametric metrics for visualizations for the non-parametric results, as non-parametric metrics were more or less equal.

Conclusions (1/2)

Seventh-day Adventists in Buddhist-majority countries are more altruistic than those in Christian- or Muslim-majority countries, indicating that the religious majority context influences altruistic concern.

Since Buddhism has no theodicy, it does not need to justify why a good God permits evil (Moe, 2016). Instead, the doctrine of dependent co-arising (*paṭicca samuppāda*) provides a reality that is interdependent and mutually causative (Macy, 1979). Thus, good and evil co-arise, are interdependent, and mutually causative as well. In the same way, the individual and the community, and the doer and the deed, are also mutually causative (Macy, 1979).

Conclusions (2/2)

How does this doctrine of independent co-arising influence altruistic concern?

Given that everything and everyone are mutually causative, a person pulled down by pain and suffering pulls down everyone in a community as well. Pulling that person up, even slightly, also pulls up everyone in the community-- the effects are expected to be either immediate or soon.

On the other hand, for Christians and Muslims, helping up a person pulled down by suffering and pain does not guarantee immediate rewards-- as they are expected to occur in the Second Coming or the afterlife.

Applications (1/2)

Impact of Religious Pluralism: Findings highlight the influence of the religious and cultural context on Seventh-day Adventists' perceptions of suffering and responsibility. This raises questions about how religious pluralism affects the way Seventh-day Adventists view their role in mitigating suffering.

Diversity in Moral Responsibility: There appears to be a generational difference in how Seventh-day Adventists perceive their responsibility for mitigating suffering in different religious settings, which may reflect evolving ethical and theological perspectives within the Adventist community.

Theological Adaptation: The generational difference may signal a shift in theological priorities and values across generations, which may lead to discussions about the need for theological adaptations.

Applications (2/2)

Theological Reflection on Compassion: Theological questions about the role of compassion and empathy in Adventist theology should be asked. It could encourage a deeper exploration of the theological foundations for caring for the suffering and disadvantage.

Interfaith Relations and Collaboration: Adventists in regions with a dominant religion other than Christianity may need to consider how to work together with people of other faiths to address common humanitarian concerns.

Suffering and Theodicy: Adventists may need to consider how their understanding of God's role in the presence of suffering is shaped by the cultural and religious context and how this relates to their own mission and ministry.

References

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