
Religiosity and Social Behaviors among Malay Families

Dr. Mohammad(Mohd) Fauzi Yaacob¹, Mohammad Kazem Tavakoley Ghinani²

1- University of Malaya (Universiti Malaya), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

2- University of Malaya (Universiti Malaya), Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Abstract

Malaysia is one of, if not the most, the advanced Muslim countries in the world. During the 1980's and 1990's, also known as the Mahathir era, the country experienced a challenging economic growth which eventually ended at a turning point: the shift from an agrarian economy to that of an industrial export-oriented one. The aim of this article is to examine the extent in which Islam plays a role in the social behavior of urban Malays who are brought face to face with the modernization process and the western values that come with it. Moreover, the study pays particular attention to the manner in which changes have occurred on role expectations among couples of various degrees of religiosity as the family unit shifts over time; that is, from the 1960s' generation to that of the 1990s. It examines the behavior of young and elderly Malay couples of varying degrees of religiosity as well as their attitudes towards certain social variables. The study indicators of the manifestation of religiosity reveal that despite the country's vast economic achievement, the young couples of the 1990s are almost as religious as the young couples of the 1960s.

Keywords: Religiosity, Attitudes, Social Behavior, Economic Growth, Religious Practice, Malay Family, and Modernization

Introduction

The present urban Malays are exposed to varying circumstances very much different from those to which Malays of previous generations were exposed to. Areas of difference include education, mass media, the speed in which western and non-Malay Asian values are spread, welfare facilities, income, occupation and job opportunities, political and economic power, exposure to Islam, as well as economic orientation (i.e. the shift from an agrarian to an industrial society). The concern of the study is to determine the relationship between man, religion and the society among urban Malay couples in Malaysia considering such circumstances.

Of the three major ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia - i.e. Malays, Chinese, and Indians – the Malays are the only natives. The other two ethnic groups migrated to Malaysia in large numbers in the late 19th century up to the first half of the 20th century. After its independence, the Chinese were by then almost exclusively urban and mainly involved in commerce and industry while a majority of the Indians were estate workers; although a good number also lived in urban areas employed in different occupations. The rural population remained predominantly Malay.

Although the most important event in Malaysian history is its political independence in 1957, it was the uprising in 1969 which has had an extensive socio-cultural impact on the Malaysians. Different Malay groups, from the religious extremists to the moderates, manifested a need to challenge the strength of the religion; a need which arose from the fear of losing their identity and their faith due to the

¹ Associate Professor

². PhD. in communication, corresponding author

economic power of the Chinese immigrants (and to a lesser extent that of the Indians) and the significant attainment of political power by non-Muslims in the 1969 parliamentary elections. After the racial riots of the same year, the government formulated a special long-term plan for the next 20 years and another 10-year plan to reduce the economic gap between races. The uprising also served as a reinforcing event for Islamic revivalism. It is known as the da'wah movement (i.e. the inviting of people to the religion of Islam) which became increasingly strong in Malaysia and in the 1970s and the 1980s it contained a threatening tone (Hussin Mutalib, 1990: 73; Sharifah, 1993:1). During the 80s and the 90s, the country enjoyed one of the highest rates of economic growth in the world. Since then, the parallel pattern of economic growth and religious revivalism has become deeply entrenched in the everyday life of the Malays, particularly those in urban areas.

The main factors of change in Malaysia's recent history are growth, ethnic competition, and religious revivalism. Furthermore, this period of time saw a significant internal migration of Malays from rural to urban areas; a phenomenon which had two consequences: the behavioral change in the lifestyle of the Malays, and the demographic change of ethnic groups in urban areas from being Chinese dominated to being less compared to the Malays. The simultaneous occurrence of rapid modernization and religious movement was not only a new phenomenon in contemporary Malay history, but also a unique one among the Muslim nations.

Methodology

The survey population was randomly selected from a range of middle income groups in five localities in Kuala Lumpur particularly among the young and elderly Malay families living in this city. The sample was limited to those couples who got married in 1968 (the year before the uprising) or earlier and to those who got married in 1983 or after. The former would be referred to as elderly families and the latter, the young ones. To better identify the differences between the two generations, there is a minimum gap of fourteen years separating both. Both husband and wife of each sample family were interviewed. A total of 476 couples, 241 young and 235 elderly ones, answered the questionnaire.

Findings and Discussion

There are certain facts on the religiosity of the respondents which have been noted. First, each generation has its own characteristics and its own circumstances; therefore, it is not possible to judge the exact level of religiosity from one generation to another. There were more motivations, inducements and opportunities for change in the 1990s compared to the 1960s. These elements of change are not all related to modernization and economic growth but also to other sources of change such as politics, ideology and religion (such as the da'wah movement). Second, when people get older they usually become more other-world conscious. This is particularly true for Muslims who believe in judgment in the hereafter. Consequently, elderly people usually become more religious compared to when they were younger.

Types of Religiosity

A typology of religiosity was derived from the respondents' claims on their religious behavior; not from observation. To determine the religious affinity of the young couples of the 1960s and to compare them to the young couples of the 1990s, a set of questions was asked. The elderly respondents were asked to describe their present religious practices and attitudes and also to recall their religious attitudes and behavior when they were young during the 1960s. The questions referred to prayers, recitation of the Qur'an, attendance at the mosque, the religious congregations, Islamic education, and the importance of religion in their everyday life.

To identify degree of religiosity, the study set up a five level typology for religiosity: 'not religious = type A', 'slightly religious = type B', 'moderately religious = type C', 'quite religious = type D', and 'very religious = type E'. In this study, the term 'less religious' refers to both types B and C while the term 'more religious' refers to types D and E.

Study data indicate that majority of the young couples and almost all of the elderly couples are 'moderately religious' (type C) or more than that. About 75.1 percent of the young husbands and 64.7 percent of the young wives are regarded as type C and 'more religious', while 93.6 percent of the elderly husbands and 92.8 percent of the elderly wives are so (Table 1). The young husbands are more religious than their wives but the elderly husbands and wives are identical in their religiosity.

Table 1: Types of Religiosity of the Young and Elderly Couples (%)

	Young husbands	Young wives	Elderly husbands	Elderly wives
Type A: Not religious	5.8	5.4	1.7	2.1
Type B: Slightly religious	19.1	29.9	4.7	5.1
Type C: Moderately religious	40.2	39.0	24.3	33.2
Type D: Quite religious	26.6	17.8	46.4	39.6
Type E: Very religious	8.3	7.9	23.0	20.0
Total	100	100	100	100
Mean*	3.12	2.93	3.84	3.70

*The mean derived from the following scores: not religious = 1, slightly religious = 2, moderately religious = 3, quite religious = 4, and very religious = 5.

As the table illustrates, the young husbands and wives are more or less 'moderately religious' (M = 3.12 and 2.93 respectively) and elderly husbands and wives are less than 'quite religious' (M = 3.84 and 3.70).

Social Behavior and Religiosity

Furthermore, the study examines the behaviour and attitudes of the two generations with their varying degrees of religiosity towards certain social variables, namely: marriage, customs and ceremonies, birth control, child-rearing, women, husband-wife relationships, recreation, modern appliances, mass media, and ethnic relations. For a more logical comparison, the elderly respondents were asked to describe their attitudes when they were young, not the ones they hold at present.

Being conservative: The more religious the respondents are, the more they have been married in the traditional way, willing their children to marry so, anxious about lack of manners and propriety of their children, and anxious about their lack of responsiveness to parental advise.

The study reveals that type A and the 'less religious' (i.e. Types B and C) young couples became acquainted with each other before marriage more directly than the 'more religious' ones (i.e. Types D and E). Where young couples who got married through arranged ways are concerned, there has been no relationship noted between how they got married and their types of religiosity; whereas, with the elderly couples, the more religious they are the more they have gone through arranged marriages (Table 2). On the other hand, the more religious the respondents are, the more keen they are to find a mate for young people through arranged marriage, through the help of parents, relatives and friends; and, they are less interested on the fact that young boys and girls select their mates themselves.

Table 2: Relationship between the Religiosity of Young and Elderly Couples and their Attitudes towards their Selection of a Spouse and Premarital Meetings

	Young families		Elderly families	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Arranged marriage	0.32218	0.33918	0.55395	0.55791
Selection of spouse by themselves	-0.11365	-0.12879	-0.34785	-0.38524
Meeting freely	-0.42825	-0.33107	-0.30756	-0.31704
Meeting in the presence of a chaperon	0.48426	0.40679	0.12891	0.15110

The correlation (Pearson's r) indicates that the more religious the respondents are, the more they are opposed to the idea that prospective spouses can meet freely or can meet in public places with the permission of parents. The more religious they are, the more favorable they are to the choice of 'meetings of prospective spouse' in the presence of a chaperon. The young and religious couples are stricter than the elderly ones where premarital meetings of their young sons and daughters are concerned, but are more willing to accept other religiously-approved relationships.

Table 3: Relationship between Religiosity of Young and Elderly Couples and Being Religion Conscious

	Young families		Elderly families	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Read printed materials on religion	0.38298	0.37388	0.19064	0.20325
Watch television programs on religion	0.45769	0.36717	0.27857	0.32831

Being religion conscious: The use of the mass media such as radio, television and printed materials is part and parcel of everyday life in society today. The more religious the respondents are, the more they read printed materials and watch television programs on religion (Table3). The relationship is stronger among young families compared to the elderly ones.

Birth control: The desired number of children is related, 'though not strongly, to the types of religiosity. The more religious the respondents are, the more they are interested in having children. This relationship is weaker among the elderly couples ($r = 0.08099$) compared to the young ones ($r = 0.17988$). Moreover, the 'less religious' of both generations are the main users of contraceptives. There is a weak negative relationship between the type of religiosity among the young and elderly couples and their use of contraceptives. This relationship is more negative for young couples ($r = -0.24226$) than for the elderly ones ($r = -0.16480$).

Child rearing: Three aspects of child rearing were studied among the urban Malays: main anxieties concerning their children, correcting child's misbehavior and parental tolerance of a young child's career choice. 'Not praying' and 'lack of responsiveness to parental advice' are the main anxieties for both young and elderly couples. In addition, the 'less religious' respondents worry about drug addiction and failing in studies as new disquiets, while the 'more religious' ones have more fear for the loss of conformity to the prevailing traditional behavior, speech, or morality. The elderly generation is more worried about 'not praying' compared to the younger generation. This is truer among the 'less religious' than the 'more religious' ones. The 'lack of responsiveness to parental advice' is a strong fear among the 'more religious' younger generation compared to the elderly ones which is an indicator of the importance of adopting traditions, family obligations as well as religious values among Malay families.

Table4: Relationship between Religiosity of Young and Elderly Couples and Rectifying Child's Misbehavior

Methods of rectifying	Young families		Elderly families	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Giving Advice	0.01559	0.07891	-0.08352	-0.08525
Scolding and canning	0.03682	-0.00352	-0.06994	-0.10074
Isolating	0.30193	0.34044	0.10045	0.20329
Religious reasoning	0.34161	0.36954	0.34843	0.38529
Depriving	0.30430	0.29621	0.17977	0.24384
Beating	0.27621	0.24205	0.22888	0.25850

There is a positive relationship between types of religiosity and correcting child misbehavior by using religious reasoning, isolating a child as punishment, depriving a child of privileges and pocket money, and beating them (Table 4). The more religious the respondents are, the more inclined they are to use religious reasoning as well as rigid rectifying methods to correct a child's misbehavior. There is a relationship between religious attachment and being more conscious about a child's propriety; in other words, the 'more religious' couples are stricter than the 'less religious' couples in rearing their children.

There are negative attitudes towards some modern entertainment industry careers such as being a movie star, musician, and singer. The most negative attitudes come from type E couples. The more religious the respondents are the more negative their attitudes towards the above occupations. The correlations for young and elderly husbands are between -0.20728 to -0.30882 and for wives between -0.33281 to -0.49701.

Husband-wife relationship: The more religious the respondents are, the more they believe that it is the responsibility of the husbands to decide on family residence, buying a car, and their wives' work (Table 5). There is a significant positive relationship between the religiosity of elderly couples and the husbands' decision making on the budget for food; in contrast, no meaningful correlation exists between the young couples and this variable. The relationship between the religiosity of elderly wives and the 'authority of their husbands over child rearing' and 'wife's work' is stronger compared to those of the young wives.

Table5: Relationship between Religiosity of Young and Elderly Couples and Attitudes towards Husbands' Decision Making on Family Affairs

Types of decision makings	Young families		Elderly families	
	husbands	Wives	husbands	Wives
Child rearing	0.13863	0.11367	0.11119	0.17085
Buying car	0.19176	0.12783	0.17053	0.08857
Buying/renting house	0.28182	0.26545	0.05374	0.11482
Budget for food	-0.03153	0.03416	0.33260	0.30785
Wife's work	0.31007	0.21330	-0.01036	0.39789

Furthermore, the more religious the respondents are, the less they believe on the authority of wives to go shopping, to visit friends and relatives, to become involved in social and religious activities, and having the responsibility of child rearing (between -0.15613 to -0.45507).

Being in-group: To find the correlation between religiosity and ethnic relations, three aspects of ethnic relations were examined: patronage of public eating houses owned by Malays and non-Malays, the neighborhood they live in, and the circle of friends they keep. The study reveals that the more religious the couples of both generations are, the less interested they are to dine out at Chinese and Indian restaurants (Table 6). The negative relationship is stronger by types of religiosity among husbands than wives.

Table 6: Relationship between Religiosity of Young and Elderly Couples and Non-Muslims

	Young families		Elderly families	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
Indian restaurants	-0.34430	-0.33507	-0.27667	-0.26026
Chinese restaurants	-0.28976	-0.23296	-0.26427	-0.18019
Indian friends	0.04459	0.04422	-0.22740	-0.14671
Chinese friends	0.03720	-0.00114	-0.15165	-0.11442

In the multi-ethnic city of Kuala Lumpur, the choice of place of residence whether Malay-Indian, Malay-Chinese and all-Malay localities is related to the desirability for a particular ethnic group. True to all respondents, the least choice is for Malay-Indian areas. The 'less religious' and 'moderately religious' respondents of both generations, more than the 'more religious' ones, are interested to live in Malay-Chinese localities. While the choice of residence in all-Malay places by young husbands and wives has no relation to their degrees of religiosity, the majority of 'more religious' elderly ones are keen to live in a place where all of the neighbors are Malay.

Having Chinese or Indian friends for young couples is not related to their types of religiosity. For elderly couples, the more religious they are, the less they have non-Malay friends. The negative relationship is stronger for the husbands compared to the wives.

Thus, the more religious the elderly couples are, the less they are associated with non-Malays whether it is having non-Muslim friends, living in a non-Malay place, or going to non-Malay restaurants. The young couples are more tolerant considering that degrees of their religiosity are not related to their choice of residence and having non-Malay friends.

5.7. Traditions and Ceremonies: Of the Malay traditions and ceremonies, the study focuses solely on the marriage ceremony as a sample of ceremonies and traditional wear. There is no relationship between the types of religiosity of the young couples and the kind of ceremony they had for their weddings ($r = 0.04559$); but, between the types of religiosity of the elderly couples and the types of marriage ceremonies is a weak negative relationship ($r = -0.124750$).

Clothes of both male and female respondents were studied with regards to their religiosity. The 'less religious' husbands of both the young and elderly generations often wear western types of clothing and seldom wear traditional and religious ones. The 'more religious' young and elderly husbands are eager to wear traditional and religious attire and less interested in wearing western clothes. There is a positive relationship between the type of religiosity of young and elderly husbands and the wearing of traditional and religious attire ($r = 0.17259$ to 0.45913); but it is negative for wearing western attire ($r = -0.09485$ to -0.37875).

There is a very weak negative relationship between the type of religiosity and the wearing of western attire. The more religious the female respondents are, the more they are interested to wear religious attire. The more religious the young and elderly wives are, the less keen are they to wear the baju kurung (traditional religious dress) without a scarf and to wear western attire ($r = -0.06158$ to -0.18343). The correlation shows that there is a stronger relationship between types of religiosity and forms of dressing among young wives compared to the elderly ones.

Use of modern Appliances: The 'less religious' types in both young and elderly families enjoy the highest level of use of modern appliances. There is a weak negative relationship between the use of modern appliances and the types of religiosity for young families at point -0.18961 , and for elderly families at point -0.16491 .

Recreation: Recreational activities are examined in terms of their relationship with religiosity. The correlation indicates that there is a negative relationship between the types of religiosity of elderly families and going to a park, a club, playing a musical instrument, listening to music, and watching sports ($r = -0.06945$ to -0.47895). For elderly families, the correlation for going to the cinema is a very weak positive relationship ($r = 0.09111$). However, the 'more religious' elderly couples more than the 'less religious' ones go to the cinema.

Mass media: From among the different media of mass communications, the study examined the relationship between types of religiosity and watching television and reading magazines. The more religious the respondents are, the less interested are they to watch local and foreign television programs on information and education, local and foreign movies, and foreign

entertainment. On the other hand, religious programs are shown to have a positive relationship with the types of religiosity of the respondents, i.e. the more religious they are, the more they are keen to watch religious programs. The strongest negative relationship exists for foreign movies, while the strongest positive relationship is for religious programs (Table7). Thus, foreign films and programs are significantly negatively related to the types of religiosity of the respondents.

Table7: Relationship between Religiosity of Young and Elderly Couples and Watching Television Programs

	Young families		Elderly families	
	Husbands	Wives	Husbands	Wives
News	0.20166	0.07413	0.06652	-0.04319
Local films	0.20445	0.25049	-0.14365	-0.11588
Foreign films	-0.19428	-0.07866	-0.20185	-0.16667
Religious films	0.45769	0.36717	0.27857	0.32831

The respondents' attitudes towards eight types of printed materials commonly published in magazines are examined in terms of religiosity. They include women, youth, science, religion, news, entertainment, information and education, and socio-political issues.

The above correlations indicate that the more religious the elderly couples are, the less interested they are to read printed materials on youth, science, information and education, and social and political issues ($r = -0.05531$ to -0.22952). The young couples' religious affinities have a positive role on reading materials about youth and news ($r = 0.16482$ to 0.31130), and a negative role on materials on entertainment, information and education ($r = -0.07586$ to -0.16121). Moreover, the more religious the young and elderly couples are, the more they are keen to read printed materials on religion ($r = 0.19064$ to 0.38298). This relationship is stronger among young couples compared to elderly ones.

Conclusion

Results of the study reveal that there are correlations between types of religiosity and selected variables of everyday life of urban Malay families. The more religious the respondents are, the higher the tendency to be conservative, religion conscious, strict with their children, acknowledging the responsibility of husband in house affairs, limiting a wife's authority for outdoors activities, being in-group, willingness for social and educational developments, and amusements. The study therefore supports Weber's thesis on the influence of beliefs on social actions.

It is important to note that the findings show that religious ethics are not barriers to the process of change since the 'more religious' respondents selected to accept changes. To give some examples as being so, the 'more religious' couples of both generations more than the 'less religious' ones watch television programs on news, religion, local movies (for young couples) and local entertainments (for elderly couples). The 'more religious' elderly couples more than the 'less religious' ones go to the cinema. Moreover, the use of deodorants is more common among the 'more religious' young and elderly wives compared to the 'less religious' ones.

Furthermore, the correlation between the variables and types of religiosity was limited mainly between 'no relations' and 'weak relations' (i.e. 0.0 and 0.3). The above relationships between religiosity and selected variables reveal that the correlations are mostly weak; meaning to say, if they are negative then they are not barriers to change. Thus, the negative relations between

religiosity and said social actions indicate that they may slow down the speed of change but do not serve as obstacles to the phenomenon of change. By any measure, the urban middle income Malay families are deeply religious families. Their degree of religiosity is between 'moderately' to 'quite' religious, which means they are committed to Islamic ethics, rituals and practices as well as to mainly dealing with individual and social affairs with an Islamic world view. For them, Islam, too, is deeply entrenched in their identity.

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