



Research Article

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The Challenges of Mixed Marriage in Malaysia from *Mualaf's* Circle

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Abstract

The goal of a marriage is to achieve a peace and tranquility of life, foster love, preserve self-purity, carry out the demands of the Shari'ah, and take care of the offspring and is the best way to develop children's education. However, the family's life is often hit by typhoons of life which require the skipper to drive efficiently, decently, and patiently to get to his destination safely. The mixed marriage among Mualaf is also inseparable from this challenge and conjecture. This study aims to look at the challenges of intermarriage practices in the family environment of Mualaf in Malaysia. This study was interviewing 20 Muslim converts in Malaysia from different locations. The results of the study found that Muslim converts face various challenges in surviving the family. Among the challenges faced by the new convert are facing resistance and a cold relationship with the original family; a frosty relationship with the Muslim family of origin, has failed to understand the Malay language well, the challenges of finance, education, child negligence difficulties in obtaining religious education. This study is significant because it reveals the real challenges that occur among the mualaf community in Malaysia in the context of intermarriage.

Keywords: Challenge, Mixed Marriage, Mualafs Circle, Malaysia, Relationships

1. Introduction

A Malay old saying says "even the tongue sometimes bitten, so does the relationship between husband and wife" which means that a marriage will not be lonely from the challenges of married life. The challenges such as misunderstanding, financial and job instability, and issues related to death are normal things that happen in family life. The ability to make changes in family life needs to be internally based. The transformation process based on religious values such as forgiveness, commitment and sacrifice should be the basis for understanding the family management.

The nature of marriage is a normative aspect that is very important for every human being. Therefore, every parent hopes and ensures their children are always happy, especially after getting married. As a normative aspect, marriage becomes a superior indicator that an individual is given a wider task and responsibilities, challenges and needs to be creative and informative in solving issues that occur in the household. The expression of good values in the family manifested in communication and behavior reflects the real situation that occurs in marriage.

2. Literature Review

Marriage in a broad 'understanding' can be expressed as a form of legal relationship through a bond between a man and a woman that is founded on beliefs and embroidered with their beliefs, culture and socio-customs (Asila Nur Adlynd and Siti Marziah, 2019). Malaysia is populated by citizens of various ethnicities, religions, races, and lineages. Couples marrying from different religious and ethnic groups are not a new phenomenon in this country. Suraya et al. (2019) explained that the situation of embracing Islam in Malaysia is one of the reasons for cross-ethnic intermarriage. Furthermore, the history of intermarriage has been manifested as a form of political and religious relationship for hundreds of years ago. The government plays an important role in maintaining peace in the region through intermarriage, such as in the marriage of Sultan Mansor Syah with princess Hang Li Po from China (Nor Adina and S Salahudin, 2018). Marriage is also a form of relationship that touches the relationship biologically to allow the couple to legally inherit offspring (Asila Nur Adlynd and Siti Marziah, 2019). Through marriage, the developed relationship will create an environment and a feeling that are safer, more comfortable, and more prosperous according to their belief framework. Related to this, Dini Farhana et al. (2019) stated that there is a strong relationship between aspects of faith with the well-being and strength of married couples' relationships.

Intermarriage is a process of harmonization in the life of a country populated by various ethnic groups. The practice of intermarriage in Malaysia is not a new thing whereby intermarriage has been widely practiced between non-local ethnicities and local ethnicities before the era of colonialism. Thus, various new groups were born such as Peranakan Jawi, Peranakan Arab, Samsam, Chetti Melaka, Punjabi Peranakan in Perak, Baba-Nyonya in Melaka, Chinese Peranakan Terengganu, Chinese Peranakan (village Chinese) Kelantan and Eurasian-Portuguese/Serani (Kristang) in Malacca is the result of the amalgamation process in intermarriage (Pue Giok Hun, 2015). Intermarriage is also known as 'exogamy' which it is a form of integration that can build unity between two separate communities. The integration in intermarriage includes the process of reducing and further eliminating racial sentiments and sharing an identity where each couple equally be emotionally and psychologically responsible to the family. Therefore, Miri Song (2009) stated that the increasing rate of intermarriage in society is an indication of a harmonious society.

A basic reference to marriage in Islam explains that religious differences prevent a Muslim from marrying a non-Muslim. This law is based on God's words in verse 221 of al-Baqarah verse which translated:

"And do not marry polytheistic women until they believe. And a believing slave woman is better than a polytheist, even though she might please you. And do not marry polytheistic men [to your women] until they believe. And a believing slave is better than a polytheist, even though he might please you. Those invite [you] to the Fire, but Allah invites to Paradise and to forgiveness, by His permission. And He makes clear His verses to the people that perhaps they may remember."

Based on God's words above, the word 'nikah' refers to the concept of marriage, which is a contract that contains the words *ijab* and *qabul* to legalize intercourse between a male and female couple (Abdul Rahman al-Jaziri n.d) based on certain conditions and principles (Mustafa et al. 1992). Al-Qurtubi (1967) explained that the purpose of marriage in Islam is to create peace (*sakinah*), nurture the value of love (*mawaddah*) and give birth to blessed and healthy offspring (*rahmat*).

In Malaysia, non-Muslim individuals who wish to marry any Muslim individuals are required to convert to Islam. This means that Islam allows its followers from marrying across races and cultures if the spouse is Muslim. The practice of intermarriage can further strengthen the spread of Islam when information about the beauty of Islam can be conveyed to non-Muslim's family members through the role of the *Mualaf* himself. Meanwhile the family relationships and friendships between different cultures can be tied, brought closer, and strengthened again. The marriage relationship is not only about the married couple but also the both parents' couple, all members of the family and the community. Based on the Enactment of the Islamic Family Law (Terengganu) 2017, explained as follows: (1) No man can marry a non-Muslim except a *Kitabiyyah* and (2) No woman can marry a non-Muslim. It was further explained that 'Kitabiyyah' means: (a) a woman from the Bani Ya'qub lineage; or (b) a Christian woman from the lineage of Christians before Prophet Muhammad became a Messenger; or. (c) a Jewish woman from the descendants of Jews before Prophet Jesus became a Messenger. Concerning this, Imam Syafi'e believes that what is meant by the women *ahlul kitāb* are not the followers of Jews or Christians like today but the women who existed in the time of the Messenger of Allah and the Qur'an at that time had not been revealed (Muhammad, 2013). Therefore, during the 18th Fatwa Authority Conference of the National Council for Islamic Religious Affairs of Malaysia on 14 May 1980, the marriage of a *Kitabiyyah* woman was discussed. The conference has decided that the marriage of a Muslim with a non-native *Kitabiyyah* woman is invalid.

In Malaysia, the term *Mualaf* refers to a group that has recently converted to Islam, consisting of originally local non-Muslim groups such as Chinese, Indians; and bumiputeras from Sabah and Sarawak. Even so, there are non-citizens who embrace Islam in Malaysia, consisting of foreign workers and tourists who convert to Islam (Ghazali, 2020). The naming of the term *Mualaf* is an appreciation of Islam towards the group that has just embraced Islam so that this group is given special attention. This matter is explained in the word of God in al-Tawbah verse: 60 which translated:

"Zakah expenditures are only for the poor and for the needy and for those employed to collect [zakah] and for bringing hearts together [mualaf] and for freeing captives [or slaves] and for those in debt and for the cause of Allah and for the [stranded] traveller - an obligation [imposed] by Allah. And Allah is Knowing and Wise."

Based on this word of God, *Mualaf* is portrayed as a group that is given appreciation and attention by being given zakat, with the hope that the giving will be able to strengthen his heart to Islam. In other words, this group needs to be given attention because they are still vulnerable in learning about Islam and they need to be monitored so that they do not revert to their previous religion. The giving of zakat aid became a very effective platform to attract other non-Muslim communities to embrace Islam (Ibnu Kathir, 1981).

There are several motivations caused the *Mualafs* to choose Islam as their new religion. Among these factors are receiving divine guidance, socializing, family roles and marriage (Kamarulzaman and Nur A'thiroh Masyaa'il, 2020). Thus, the marriage factor becomes one of the factors of this community in choosing to embrace Islam. But this factor of marriage is closely related to the factor of their early association with Muslim friends. There are several different situations of *Mualaf* marriage in Malaysia:

- i. Just converted because he wanted to marry a Muslim couple
- ii. Just got married to a Muslim couple after embracing the religion
- iii. Keep their current spouses because they embrace religion together (Ghazali, 2020).

Among the aspects that strengthen the unity in the relationship between the *Mualaf* community and the hereditary Muslim is the existence of a relationship based on a bond of common faith. Through the bond of the same faith, Islamic values and national culture can be channeled, given interpretation and reintegration according to the framework of the Islamic faith. In the context of a pluralistic country like Malaysia where Islam is the dominant religion, new Muslims are known

as new brothers, our brothers, or *Mualafs* play the role of being an effective agent of enculturation and socialization to channel true Islamic information to their families and communities, especially through intermarriage. Johari Yap (2019) stated that more than 80 per cent of MACMA *mualaf* intermarried, especially between Malays and Chinese. Children who are born from mixed marriages are usually “colour blind” and not racist because they are neither too Malay nor too Chinese.

Several studies have discussed about the practice of intermarriage in Malaysia. A study conducted by Mohd Juhar et al. (2019) explained that the increase in the arrival of foreign migrants to this country has caused an increase in intermarriage. There is a tendency among the local community to marry foreigners living in the country. A qualitative study conducted by Nurzahidah (2011) in Selangor tried to investigate the level of happiness of intermarriage on family well-being. The results of the study showed that eight informants gave good feedback of satisfaction in mixed marriages. Furthermore, a study conducted by Latifah et al. (2016) found that the Hadrami Arab community who intermarried with the Malay community could adapt to Malay culture. However, there are among them who still maintain the traditions and exclusive way of Arabs’ life. In the context of language use, a qualitative study conducted by Ainun Rozana and Mac Yin Mee (2017) entitled ‘The Language Choice among Chinese-Indian Mixed-Marriage Families in Malaysia’ found that English is the medium of choice for children to communicate in-house. This study was conducted to investigate the use of the language used by Chindian, which is the Chinese community who married Indians. Next, a study conducted by Budi Anto Mohd Tamring and Saidatul Nornis Mahali (2020) states that intermarriage occurs due to emotional factors stimulated by various other factors such as population demographics, interaction, and government policy, culture, religion, and tolerance. His study tries to explain the practice of intermarriage in a multi-ethnic society in Kota Kinabalu. This study used a questionnaire for data collection with a total of 731 respondents as study participants. The findings show that the practice of intermarriage in the respondent's family is high, not only across race but also across religion and nationality. However, a study conducted by Zurina and Mohd Abdul Jalal (2019) found intermarriage to be one of the contributors to the erosion of marriage customs in the Bugis community in Johor. The qualitative study carried out aimed in identifying the customary practice of marriage in the Bugis community and studying the factors why the lack of customary marriage practices in the Bugis community is practiced. The results of the study show that the practice of intermarriage has caused the Bugis community to digest cultural assimilation, not to mention that they live in diverse groups.

In general, it has been found that there are still few studies that shed a light on intermarriage, especially among *Mualafs* in Malaysia. Previous studies have only focused on the phenomenon of intermarriage among groups of foreigners who came to Malaysia; studies on the level of happiness, language use, marriage factors and cultural erosion. However, these past studies can help researchers to contribute to the corpus of knowledge that can build theory for studies that touch on the challenges of intermarriage experienced by *Mualaf* in Malaysia.

3. Problem Statement

Since *Mualafs* have little experience of religious life in Islam, they depend on guidance from their hereditary Muslim spouses. Unfortunately, among the *Mualafs* it is quite difficult to leave the practices and customs that were commonly experienced before Islam. This problem is linked to the failure of the Muslim spouse to provide Islamic education and the best guidance to the *Mualaf*. Thus, the failure to give good commitment in this cross-ethnic marriage might cause divorce. Even more unfortunate, there are cases among *Mualafs* who are disappointed because of the failure of this family decide to return to the previous teachings or apostasy. Suariza et al. (2018) stated that there are applications to be declared out of Islam involving groups that have embraced Islam. They embraced Islam because they wanted to marry a Muslim spouse. Whereby the Muslim spouse who married them were also ignorant of Islamic teachings.

Indeed, the level of family happiness is seen as an indicator to guarantee the quality of marriage

by looking at the frequency of conflicts that arise in a marriage and the period of adjustment taken between the couples. A successful marriage usually involves each partner working hand in hand in any situation; respecting to couple's values and making mutual commitments to each other. The situation in Malaysia shows that the practice of intermarriage is a marriage that involves the union of ethnic groups with different religions and cultures. A mixed marriage that can last longer is when the husband and wife can be responsible for each other's values, be cooperative, and committed together in any situations.

4. Research Methodology

This qualitative interview was conducted through descriptive data research in the form of purposeful sampling by referring to a group that has the characteristics of the sample desired by the researcher. With that, interviews with semi-structured questions focused on a total of 25 *Mualafs* who embraced Islam in Terengganu, Johor, Kedah, Selangor, and Sabah. Before the study was carried out, the researcher had requested permission from the parties involved the Islamic Welfare Association of Malaysia (PERKIM) of Johor, PERKIM of Selangor, the Council of Islamic Religion and Malay Tradition (MAIDAM) of Terengganu, the Muslim New Brother Unit of Kedah, and the Department of Islamic Religion in Sabah. The data collection process started from August to December 2020. In addition, the interviews were also conducted on five (5) figures who were directly involved in the management of *Mualaf* in the relevant zone. Research data were collected through in-depth interviews based on an interview protocol that had been reviewed by respective experts. Data collection is also done through semi-structured and focused questions. In this regard, the questions are constructed based on the themes that have been identified, and the checklist of these questions serves as a guide during the interview process. The questions asked are related to the background of the informant's conversion to Islam, the challenges they faced when converting to Islam, and their married life experiences after they converted to Islam.

Before the actual study is conducted, a pilot study interview will be conducted to help the researcher prepare the plan to collect data. Among the steps taken is to modify the items according to the comments given by the informants and determine the type of questions required and the processes to be followed when collecting data. In addition, through a pilot study, researchers can check the validity of the instruments used and find out the constraints that exist when the data collection process is carried out. This means the interview questions are tested until the answers given by the informants are seen as consistent

For this research, the participants are *Mualafs* who are directly involved in study classes conducted by agencies and bodies involved. To maintain the confidentiality of the informants and facilitate the analysis, the author uses code info #1 to info #25 instead of the names of the study participants. Thus, the questions are given to the informants until the data obtained becomes saturated and can answer the questions and objectives of the study. The answers were recorded in audio form then were transferred in the form of verbatim transcription through a manual method by coding to produce the desired themes.

5. Result and Discussion

5.1 Background of informants

Even this study was conducted not covering all the states in Malaysia, it may describe the real situation that occurs in the *Mualaf* community in this country because the selected states are representative of the zones in Malaysia. Meanwhile, the research participants involved reflect on their religious life experiences in the zone. This is due to the factors and background of the surrounding community that will represent the views of the *Mualaf* community from all angles.

Based on table 1 above, the informant is a Malaysian citizen of Chinese, Indian, Sabah and

Sarawak ethnicities as well as foreign nationals married to local citizens. The results of the study show that most of the informants are married and choose a partner from the Malay race as a spouse. The informant, who does not have a partner caused by separation due to religious differences, is still young and a child. There are also *Mualafs* who have been divorced because they converted to Islam and are planning to remarry by choosing a partner from an Indonesian citizen working in Malaysia. The informant, who is still single, is a teenager who has just embraced Islam. After all, the effect of socializing with native Muslims, especially at work, has encouraged non-Muslims to embrace the religion and then get married and live in Muslim community.

5.2 Result

The results of the study also found that in intermarried *Mualaf* communities, it was found that they had several challenges. Among them are:

5.2.1 Receiving Opposition from Family

The factor of obtaining divine guidance is the biggest motivation for a *Mualaf* who wants to embrace Islam willingly (Kamarulzaman and Nur A'thiroh (2020). However, many times a *Mualaf's* embrace of Islam is associated with wanting to marry a Muslim partner, even though the reality is that this is not the case. This experience is explained as follows:

"Usually people will ask why they converted to Islam after getting married?.. this question is only asked by native Muslims.. it is the same for non-Muslims as well.. but we will tell you.. maybe other Mualafs embrace Islam because of marriage.. but I not because I want to get married.. because I really feel that God exists" (Info#11)

The experience of Info#21 explained that he got to know Islam through the process of socialization with the Muslim community. This is explained as follows:

"Then when I left the house in 2014, my mother's house... my tenant was actually a Muslim.. so there I always saw him eating with his hands, the way he fasted, so I also followed the way he fasted.. morning-in the morning he cooks, there he is.. from there I research about Islam".

Kamarulzaman and Nur A'thiroh (2020) explained that *Mualafs* face various challenges before, during or after they embrace Islam. The factor of wanting to marry a Malay Muslim couple is one of the motivations for *Mualafs* to embrace Islam. Opposition from the immediate family became an initial challenge for the *Mualaf* until the desire to convert had to be postponed until a time that was considered appropriate. If the wish continues, the *Mualaf* is faced with risks such as not being accepted by native family members, not being recognized as a child, having to break family ties, financial restrictions, being ostracized, and not being allowed to return home. Info#1 explained that a period of 10 years was taken to convince his parents of the justification for embracing Islam. This is explained as follows:

"Before I got married, I had already planned to get married, to convert to Islam.. only my side of the family did not want to accept because I wanted to convert to Islam.. we waited for their opinion for up to 10 years until they were satisfied to agree" (Info# 8)

The level of opposition by close family members to *Mualaf* wanting to marry a Muslim spouse varies; some are strong, some are mild, and some are accommodative. Experience Info#5 is as follows:

"When I wanted to get married, I often went to her (wife's) mother's house, at that time I was no longer Muslim. He has a mother who doesn't like it because I'm Chinese, she has people who think we don't take care of her children."

According to this, Ramli (2020) explained that family members are concerned about the welfare and future life of their relatives who choose to marry a Muslim spouse after establishing a household. Thus, in half of the cases, the religious officials explain again the guarantees provided by Islam so that family members get the true picture. The results of the study also found that many *Mualafs* have families who have embraced Islam. *Mualaf* spouses have no choice but to negotiate with their non-Muslim spouses to convert to Islam or bring a divorce petition to court (Mohd Al Adib and Azlan, 2020). This is explained by Info#16 by stating as follows:

"I am married, when I converted to Islam in 2018, my wife and children did not want to join Islam...we eventually divorced"

Indeed, one of the greatest sacrifices of a *Mualaf* in embracing Islam is to let go of the existing marital bond because one of the spouses refuses to follow in his footsteps to be Muslim and even he/she resists embracing Islam. A similar experience was expressed by Info#7, family life is a necessity and cannot be separated and needs to be replaced. Lack of understanding of the difference between Malay and Islamic practices among the native Muslim community has caused misunderstandings among *Mualafs* and non-Muslim communities (Nur Ain Sumaiyah and Noor Aishah, 2018). To avoid the bad possibilities that have happened to fellow *Mualafs* who married into the Indonesian Muslim community. Info#7 states as follows:

"I'm married and have two sons and a daughter... and I'm divorced... I chose my new partner from East Java (Indonesian)... sometimes family members thought when I converted to Islam... everyone had to change to Malay."

This early perception of *Mualaf* shows the stories that have been, are going through and will be going through various bitterness and sweetness of the household implications of embracing the religion of Islam. Spiritual quality is a goal of how to culture and develop a *Mualaf* with a new norm as a true Muslim.

5.2.2 *Adaption to the New Norm*

Kamarulzaman and Nur A'thiroh (2020) stated that a *Mualaf* who embraces Islam will certainly face a difficult situation in making changes in his or her life that was previously less bound by religious limitations. One of the most significant aspects is related to the intake and adjustment of taste in local nutrition. Indeed, each ethnic group has its taboos, tastes and eating patterns that are sometimes contradictory to other communities. In this context, each couple needs to instill mutual respect, especially in taking care of the sensitivity of each couple so the peace and harmony in the intermarriage family can continue to be maintained.

However, some informants are unable to adapt to the new norms as Muslims, especially the aspects related to the culture of their respective partners. For example, Info#3 who is from Kuala Lumpur and married to his partner from the Terengganu Malay community, explains that he is not very compatible with tasting and enjoying Terengganu cuisine which provides ingredients based on coconut milk, sweet and sometimes spicy. Usually, the informant of the Chinese community prepares soup-based dishes at home. For that, usually at lunchtime or evening, meal preparation will be done in two versions which are based on Terengganu food and Chinese food. This is explained as follows:

"I have a little problem eating Malay food... I don't really like sweets, so if I want to eat I have to cook it myself, I know how to cook it... my children have different tastes."

Related to this, Khairul Azhar (2019) stated that the 'nature of openness' in cultural aspects, especially in mixed marriage community households, can highlight that the space of tolerance provided by Islam crosses racial boundaries and can erode the perception that Islam is only monopolized by certain races. In contrast to Info#3, he tries to adapt to the new norm by trying to eat food with a variety of tastes or otherwise getting information to ensure that non-Malay restaurants

serve truly halal food. In addition, early exposure is given to his future wife to taste Chinese food so that both couples can accommodate their respective cultural customs when married. This experience is explained as follows:

"It's like my place of work... even the canteen is where the Malays cook... I also eat in Malay stalls... sometimes I want to eat Chinese, right?... I go looking for a fish curry... people ask if this is your shop can you eat it... I said this is fish, right? You can eat it... this shop only sells fish... sometimes I take my fiance to eat there, the Chinese have soup... the fish has soup... he said it's delicious... I said because you and I never tried to have it because I was afraid... so I took him to a shop that was confirmed to be halal, that shop is owned by Chinese people."

Weakness and stagnation in understanding the culture of a race can give a negative perception of Islam which can be recognized as an exclusive religion and closes the space for tolerance whereas God has recognized these racial and ethnic differences so that people can recognize each other and learn positive elements in their respective cultures-each (Khairul, 2019). Relationships in the *Mualaf* community who intermarry are not limited to the relationship between husband and wife but also relationships involving sons-in-law, daughters-in-laws, parents-in-laws and so on. In the context of intermarriage, the relationship between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law sometimes becomes strained when negative perceptions arise due to cultural differences. Info#3 explains as follows:

"When I was married to a Malay husband, I received bad treatment from my in-laws, everything I did was wrong... when I cooked he didn't want to touch my food, when I had children.. he didn't want to touch his grandchildren... he said I'm dirty...he said I married his son because I want to get wealth."

Based on the results of the study above, it can be stated that the most important issue faced by a *Mualaf* in adapting to his Muslim life is to leave any form of food that is physically not permitted by Islam, ensuring that the correct method of preparation is guaranteed to be halal and clean and satisfy their tastes and appetites.

5.2.3 Family Acceptance of Hereditary Muslim Couples

Mohamad Pairuz and Zainab (2020) explained that there was a lack of understanding due to some differences, psychological problems, cheating spouses and the interference of in-laws and in-laws among the causes of conflict in the household. The significant differences between Malay culture and other cultures are food, language, and customs, which sometimes contribute to negative stereotypes that are 'chauvinistic'. Islam does not change the lifestyle of its adherents if it does not contradict to the teachings of Islam. In addition, there are *Mualafs* who face challenges with the in-laws and in-laws of their hereditary Muslim partners because they still practice the original culture in their daily routine. For a part of the Malay community, consider that the *Mualaf* needs to change his identity as a solid Malay to become a perfect Muslim. This is narrated as follows:

"My husband is an Indian Muslim. At first, there was a little problem.. my husband's family didn't accept me... then when I embraced Islam, I got married, I moved, I just lived with my husband... people didn't accept me because I'm Indian... they don't want to accept that...our culture is different." (Info#9)

Although mixed marriages are expected to achieve the goal of integration, the relationship between parents-in-law and daughter-in-law sometimes does not stimulate the cultivation of positive values. This experience was shared by Info#5 explaining that he brought his wife back to her parents' house in Selangor. He narrated as follows:

"To establish a good relationship, my mother served a cake (bought from a Malay) to his wife. Unfortunately, his wife did not want to eat because she was suspicious of the container served by my mother. This made my mother feel sad."

Based on the transcript above, even though the mother-in-law (the Informant's mother) acted to relax the situation by taking a more loving approach to the daughter-in-law, the prejudiced attitude towards the status of the food provided caused the Informant's wife to take the safe route by avoiding something that is considered taboo in the Malay community. Nor Azura and Siti Zanariah (2018) stated that halal status does not just refer to the physical appearance of food but also includes aspects of how food is prepared and its service that meets the standards set by syari'a principles. Thus, this situation once makes the situation cloudy in the sense of a tense relationship with various negative perceptions continuing to be so.

The Islamic perspective on the relationship between husband and wife is not limited to sexual relations, communication, and the implementation of responsibilities only, but also involves relationships with family members and socializing with members of the community (Nur Faedah, 2020). However, there are among the informants who faced with a conflicting nature relationship which causes the informant to decide not to return to his parent's house considering the constant attitude of opposition and the partner's discomfort. Info#8 states that the pattern of his family's life which is 'segregated' causes all information about the Muslim community to be very lacking, added to the background of family members who are known in the community to be strongly involved in religious activities at the temple. His words are as follows:

"My parents lived in a plantation estate in Cameron Highland and did not mix with the Malays. So people do stay in that circle... they don't socialize and are not close to the Muslim community. At the beginning of embracing Islam, it was really difficult for me to go home because my family could not accept it at all and saw Islam with a negative perception. This is the biggest challenge from my parents, my family, all my relatives... in my family, I am the only one who converted to Islam..."

Nur Najwa et al. (2020) stated that *Mualafs* will feel alienated because they have just embraced Islam and all things will be brand new for them in getting to know the Islamic world. What is certain, *Mualafs* need support from the aspect of 'family' for them to remain strong and stick to the Islamic teaching. However, among *Mualafs*, some are determined not to see their husband's family again because of the attitude of the husband's family members. This is explained as follows:

"I never met my family of my husband. My husband comes from Johor... I never met my husband's family because they don't want to..." (Info#10)

He explained that *Mualaf* is a group that is trying to make changes towards goodness in their entire lives due to their religious demands. Thus, the positive and proactive support from the partner and his family further stimulates the change.

5.2.4 Communication Problem

Budi Anto and Saidatul (2020) explained that the relationship in the surrounding community can be either close or loose due to the opportunities available, especially the opportunities to interact, and not necessarily caused by the characteristics of the differences that exist between them. One of the aspects that causes a strained relationship between a *Mualaf* and his partner's family is the inability to understand the partner's language well. Some people are not able to interact using the Malay language fluently, not to mention that the language used by the couple's family is the regional language that is commonly used in certain places. In this regard, the informant explained that when he involved in activities together with his partner's family, the informant remained silent a lot because it was difficult to understand the dialects used by his partner's family. This is explained as follows:

"When I'm together in my wife's family, I'm silent a lot. I don't understand a lot of the language she uses. Likewise, if I'm involved in a car party, I'm just silent... If she asks me, I nod... I'm afraid I'll make a

mistake. Understand.” (Info#3)

Non-citizen *Mualafs* who marry into the Malay community, they will usually use English as the main medium of communication. For example, Info#10, he uses English a lot when communicating with his partner's family and the surrounding community. Even though interviews with the researcher himself, when interacting, the Informant failed to understand when Malay terms were used. Nevertheless, Ramli (2020) explained that *Mualafs* who are unable to understand the Malay language well usually take at least six months to understand the studies carried out in class. Related to this, Noraisikin et al. (2020) explained that the attitudes, behaviors and perceptions of intermarried communities refuse ethnic characteristics due to ethnic changes and regional mobility that have placed their mother tongue in a situation of language transition. Among the *Mualafs*, they are like mushrooms, thrown wherever they go, they will surely sprout; that's how Info#2 is, even though he can't interact well in Malay, he involved in the da'wah volunteer organization under MAIDAM. He explained as follows:

“I build relationships with the family and the community... we invite them to be good... don't criticize but make them friends... there are also Muslims who are not very good... we make friends with them... invite them to change... we don't insult him.” (Info#2).

Effective communication is very beneficial in building the religious confidence of the *mualaf* community. This study found that each informant has his reasons and evaluations in understanding teachings and a phenomenon that occurs in religious life through social relationships that occur.

5.2.5 Challenges from Financial Aspects

It is often heard that among the challenges faced by *Mualaf* are financial problems due to layoffs by employers or family, and the problem of spouses who are not responsible and refuse to be independent. This is explained by Ghazali Ismail (2020) as follows:

“Usually Mualafs who faced economic problems having husband who are irresponsible. We know through them telling us. Problems in terms of the economy such as living wage problems, jobs, not enough money to spend and so on.”

This is also explained by Abdul Halim Lim (2020) as follows:

“The most significant challenge is that the Mualaf always expects help.. so there is no effort not to be an 'applicant'... he has no effort to come out as a status as a requester for help... there are a few who are not like that... but the recipient of help will always expect assistance... we have independent capital assistance... such as for business, for sewing machines.. for flour kneading machines and so on.”

Financial problems are not only caused by job loss factors but sometimes caused by other factors such as having an unstable job, and the head of the family is not caring about family affairs. After having been married for a long time, there are among the *Mualafs* who faced financial problems due to the spouse who does not have a permanent job or is not working. The situation worsens when the commitment to the family increases after being blessed with a child. Info#1 explains as follows:

“My husband doesn't have a permanent job...I have to work at Giant supermarket, my children stay close to home.”

There are among the *Mualafs* who have married and decided to leave their husbands and children and start a new life away from their original family. In this regard, *Mualafs* hope for full assistance from the Department of Religion and adoptive families because they have no source of income. This is explained as follows by Info#20:

"I embraced Islam in Samariang (Sarawak), I left my children and my husband with my friend to Kedah. I don't work and live with a foster family... a lot of help is given by religious officials."

In the context of a cross-cultural marriage setting, the husband is usually the head of the family who needs to stimulate the personal formation and behavior of his partner towards praiseworthy qualities. However, there are cases where the husband is seen to be abdicating his responsibility to provide support when the husband asks the wife to go out to work while the husband just stays at home. This is explained by Ramli (2020) as follows:

"There are cases of husbands telling their wives (Mualafs) to go out to work as rubber tappers, cooks...especially among mualafs of Siamese descent...while the husband just stays at home."

Sustainable finance is one of the most important human needs. Continuing life for the next day is through economic strength. If *Mualafs* can be strengthen their economic resources, surely the negative perspective towards this community from various parties can be corrected.

5.2.6 Spouses Fail to Provide Proper Religious Education

The concept of Islamic education emphasizes on the integrated education that covers worldly and spiritual aspects. However, the Islamic religious syllabus contains things that must be learned by students and are arranged according to their age and abilities. This includes aspects that touch on belief, worship, the history of the apostles, morals, and the reading of the Qur'an. At the same time, the measure is also adapted to the needs of the community and the interests of the country (Usiono et al., 2019). Likewise, in the context of the life of a *Mualaf*, the goal of Islamic education is to be a guide to understand Islam so that this group can practice and make Islam as a way of life.

Usually, *Mualafs* who marry hereditary Muslims, expect their spouses to be able to guide them in understanding Islam or at least give permission to deepen it in the training center provided. The problem that arises is that there are Muslim converts who fail to get the best religious education because their husbands fail to explain the true concept of Islam, even among the native Muslims who do not practice Islamic values in life. Info#1 for example an informant explains that after she converted to Islam, her husband failed to give her the best Islamic education. This is explained as follows:

"My husband doesn't know how to teach me...I learn a lot from MAIDAM...usually when I have free time I will go to class since I am working."

Likewise, the explanation of Info#3 is as follows:

"I can't read the Quran, my husband doesn't teach me... when I want to go out to study with the religious office he doesn't let me."

Related to this, Norhana Ng (2017) explained that there are cases of religious officials having to send volunteers to the homes of *Mualafs* to teach them the basics of *fardu ain* due to constraints such as living far from the training center, not being allowed to go out by their husbands and so on. Sometimes the problems to get Islamic knowledge are caused by failure to understand the Malay language. This is explained as follows:

"The most language I used to learn Islam is English and Tagalog language... Malay I cannot.. In Saudi, my Ustaz Philipine explained in Tagalog...very easy to absorb what they said.. in the Malay, I cannot understand." (Info#10)

However, there are the *Mualafs* who take the initiative to dig up the Islamic knowledge through other methods such as blogs, the internet, YouTube and so on. Info#2 explains as follows:

*"I got this from my ustazah, I read from the YouTube... always watch from the YouTube... in English".
Related to this, Ghazali (2020) elaborates further:*

"like us here we see for example there is a Filipino who can't speak English, he can only speak Filipino, so we take this old Filipino to teach him.."

The failure problem of *Mualafs* to get proper Islamic education is a problem related to the family. It means that the parents of *Mualaf* who fail to get a perfect Islamic education have implications for the education of their children. Emphasis on operational education at home is the heart of the best practical Islamic education. Islamic education for children at home aims to enable children to have a perfect character and personality, practice positive moral values and Islamic values in their daily life routines, form a positive self-concept and so on. Related to this, the informant states as follows:

*"I fully expect the religious classes that are taught at school, I want to learn but I can't afford it..."
(Info#1)*

*"Sometimes my children teach me how to study..they study at school..I don't know how to learn."
(Info#22)*

Domestic happiness is closely related to the manifestation of the appreciation of religious values among family members. Islamic education that is less emphasized by a couple of *Mualafs* to some extent causes the appreciation of religious values to be quite difficult to be strengthened.

5.2.7 Returning to Islam after Apostasy

Ramli (2020) explained that there are cases of apostasy that occur among *Mualafs* due to family conflicts. *Mualafs* who are disappointed with their spouses eventually return to their original teachings, not to mention at the same time being persuaded by close family members to return to their original teachings. It is even worse when a *Mualaf* is a foreigner who marries a local. There are cases of *Mualafs* among foreigners who separated and returned to their country of origin, taking their children with them. At once, religious departments or NGO bodies have no longer the authority to monitor *Mualafs*.

Physical tranquility is the beginning of married life, while peace of mind is the main objective when entering the realm of marriage. Factors of household failure are often linked to problems related to physical or psychological aspects (Nur Faezah et al., 2020). For a community that has just embraced Islam, this failure factor in the household causes them to return to the original teachings. However, considering the relationship with the child and conversion, the informant re-embraced Islam and married her ex-husband. Through a conversation with the informant, he explained that his second life made him more committed and careful not to apostatize. For that, she decided to live with her husband in Johor Bharu, since her native village in the Philippines is surrounded by Christians. This is explained as follows Info#3:

"I'm married, with the same person Malay... we separated four years and he came back... he proposed me in the Saudi and then I married again last 2018... with the same person.. now I have two children... the first convert, the oldest... and then the youngest InshaAllah.. My family is in the Philippines... in my family Alhamdulillah we are four already converted... two of my brothers and my son... my son is 18 years old. I'm 40 years old... for now, I am staying in Malaysia because if I come back to the Philippines there may be trial and problems I become Christian again... because my surrounding there is Christian. In my village is all Christians, but half in my place is also Muslims... they separated."

Related to this, Suariza et al. (2018) stated that there are cases of applications to be declared out of Islam involve people who have converted to Islam and who have married hereditary Muslim

couples. Unfortunately, the married hereditary Muslim couple who were ignorant of Islam and even had cohabitation with their partner (before marriage) failed to educate their *Mualaf* partner well. Based on the discussion above, it can be stated that the challenges faced by the *Mualaf* community who intermarry are diverse. It can be explained as shown in figure 1 below:

6. Conclusion

Biologically, marriage is a life necessity for every human being to ensure the survival of his or her offspring. *Mualafs* do not only reorganize their religious life in terms of faith, Sharia and morals but also include it here in the aspect of building family relationships. The majority of *Mualafs* in Malaysia marry by choosing a partner from different ethnicity, race, and culture. The phenomenon of intermarriage from the *Mualaf's* circle in Malaysia found that cultural differences expose this community to diverse family life challenges such as adapting to different customs and cultures, opposition and relationships with the partner's family, communication, financial problems, the ability to get the best education from partner and return to the original teachings. Therefore, this study is seen as important because it reveals the current situation of the challenges faced by the *Mualaf* community in Malaysia.

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