

Religiosity of Muslim Adolescents from Single Parent Families Living in Government-Subsidised Settlement

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Abstract

Adolescence is a phase of emotional turmoil and stress. If not balanced with religious practice, it may cause adolescents to fall into moral and social problems such as breach of school discipline, delinquency, drug addiction and sexual permissiveness. Religiosity is one way for adolescents to deal with challenges in life thereby avoiding immoral activities. This is because religiosity may help to balance adolescent emotional, cognitive and social developments. The purpose of this study is to identify the behaviour and level of religiosity among 30 adolescents from single parents families who settle in government-subsidised area of residence, namely known as the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA). The area is located in the state of Pahang, situated on the eastern part of Malaysia. These adolescents have been selected as research respondents. This research was conducted as a survey using questionnaire as the research instrument. It was constructed based on the guidelines of Islamic Practice Instrument (IPI) (Fariza, 2012) and has already been verified in terms of its validity and reliability. The data analysis has adopted the method of descriptive statistics explained in table form. The research results have found that religiosity or religious behaviour that the adolescents most frequently abide by are staying away from gambling, having good thoughts and expectations of Allah, feeling awed and fear of Allah's power (taqwa), staying away from

fornication (*zina*) and supplication (*doa*) to Allah facing the direction of Qibla. The level of religiosity is medium for most adolescents. This factor explains why not many respondents are involved in moral and disciplinary problems at school. This research finds that generally, religiosity protects adolescents from being involved in immoral activities and other vices.

Keywords: Adolescence, Religiosity, Behaviour, Islamic practice, Immoral activities, Religious behaviour

Introduction

With the dawn of this 21st Century, adolescents are compelled to face life in an environment which threatens their psychological development. What is worrying is that adolescents are ready imitate negative social behaviour in seeking sheer pleasure. A study by Synder and Sickmund (2006) in Shaefer and Unggen (2009) reports that 58 percent out of 1.6 million cases put on trial the American Juvenile Court in the year 2002 were juvenile delinquency cases. This shows that adolescents have a propensity for behavioural offences and continue to repeat or involve themselves in other types of offences.

This adolescent attitude of regarding themselves as sufficiently matured and free to explore whatever they wish, is an inability to foresee the consequences of their actions (Eshel et al., 2007). Indirectly, it creates social problems

and brings harm to self, society, religion and country. Thus, a religious approach can play an effective role in dealing with adolescent social problems (Makiah et al., 2012).

Adolescent personal development which begins with puberty comes with drastic changes in the self. Personal changes in the adolescent may be detected as physical, psychological and social changes which have an effect on religiosity. Petts (2009) reports that studies by Regnerus (2007) as well as Smith and Denton (2005) also find that religiosity is an important part in the life of adolescents and adults. Adolescent's adherence to religious teachings will influence their spiritual development. Religiosity is even considered as the main support in managing adolescent emotional problems and feelings of stress (Good & Willoughby, 2008; Lopez et al., 2011).

Generally, adolescents who frequently involve themselves in religious practices are able to face changes and weather through various pressures which occur in adolescent's life phase (Petts, 2009). This is proven by reports of studies which show that religiosity is considered a protective factor, particularly that which involves risky, anti-social, aggressive and violent actions as well as psychological problems (Bahr et al., 1998; Bradford et al. 2008; French et al., 2008; Good & Willoughby, 2006; Sinha et al., 2007; Smith, 2003; Weaver et al., 2002; Azzyati 2013). Other studies also report that adolescents who have a higher level of religiosity show a lower level of internal (Pearce et al., 2003; Possel et al., 2011) and external problems (Laird et al., 2011; Pearce et al., 2003; Salas-Wright et al., 2012, Seri Kartini & Fariza, 2013) compared to their peers who have less religiosity.

Discussions in the above mentioned studies prove that the consistent religious practice supported by other factors, enable solving some major synonymous problems at the adolescent level, particularly involving emotions and delinquent behaviour. Meanwhile, coupled with religious practices, which relate to family factor,

creates stability through rituals propagated by the religion, namely Islam (Makiah et al., 2012). A stable family will pay attention to the knowledge and practices of the teachings of Islam for their children. However, adolescent who live in a single-parent family will be affected through behaviour, in matters relating to religious practices (Azizi et al., 2012). A study by Demuth and Brown (2004) shows that adolescents in a single-parent family tend to be involved in delinquent activity. Sufean and Che Zainon (2002) also found that adolescents who live with their single mother also experience effects to their psychological development. In a way, these adolescents can be neglected from their education because the mother is busy with work to support the family.

Religiosity

Studies from the Western counterpart have termed religious behaviour as 'religiosity' or 'religiousness'. It also refers to belief, practice, experience, identity and attitude (Smith & Denton, 2005), consciousness, behaviour and religious nature, motivation and involvement in religious activities (Smith et al., 2003). Generally, there are three main components in understanding what is meant by religiosity. The said components are known, feeling and doing (Cornwall & Cunningham, 1986).

Meanwhile, according to the Islamic perspective, religiosity is defined as awareness or consciousness of God and inclination to achieve balance between worldly needs and willingness to obey God's commands. Its purpose is to build piety, obedience and preserve behaviour. (Ashiq, 2004). This means that religiosity refers to how a person performs worship (ibadah), serves religion and wholeheartedly believes in religious teachings as a guide in this world and the hereafter. According to al-Attas (2001) in Krauss et al. (2006), religiosity is the outcome of Islamic character (*akhlaq*) based on the Doctrine of Unity (*tawhid*), specifically, Oneness of God (Allah s.w.t) in all actions and as a goal in this worldly life and the hereafter.

Religion is the core or basis and guide in managing life domains towards goodness as a goal. Thus, spirituality and religious beliefs can help an adolescent find values or goals in life. Good health, a perfect family, goals in life, satisfaction in life and emotional well-being without any problem of depression are among study findings on characteristics of persons who properly practise religion (Mohd Roslan, 2011; Poloma & Pendleton, 1990; Wong, Rew & Slaikeu, 2006). Religiosity has a positive impact on the mental health of adults and youth (Chatters et al., 2011; Kaslow et al., 2004; Levin & Chatters, 2008). Specifically, religiosity brings many benefits to adolescents, particularly in overcoming various problems in life. Religiosity will particularly help adolescents feel close to God and resolve various problems such as making the right decisions, fostering relationships, improving behaviour (Dowling et al., 2004) and setting goals in life as well as avoiding risky behaviour (Davis et al., 2003). Furthermore, religiosity is also regarded as a powerful force which can guide in equipping adolescents with certain skills in handling social ills and it plays a great role in the family institution (MacArthur, 2008).

Socially, religiosity plays a positive role and encourages good deeds and practices in relations with the surrounding community. Adolescents who have the characteristics of religiosity are found to be consistent in pro-social behaviour such as cooperation, sympathy, friendliness, concern, selflessness and desire to help others (Benson et al., 2006; Furrow et al., 2004). Nevertheless, studies show that anti-social and pro-social adolescent behaviours are also genetically inherited from parents stemming from religious education or lack of it. Thus, religiosity may be inherited through nurturing and upbringing (Kerestes et al., 2004; King & Furrow, 2004; Koenig et al., 2005).

Nevertheless, family plays an important role in adolescent psychological development such as social, emotional and cognitive (Fariza, 2013). In addition, spirituality education (religion)

is also important for adolescents and became family obligations (Naemah et al., 2015). Family factors contributed to the level of Islamic practices in the early stages of adolescence (Fariza, 2015). The process of religious education for adolescent's starts in the family. Therefore, a stable family, having complete members namely father, mother and siblings; is vital to ensure that the process of religious education has to take effect. Adolescents who have lost one of their parents, especially the mother, suffer from emotional disorders such as stress (Fariza, 2013). According to previous studies, children who live in traditional families with both parents have a high religious practice (Myers, 1996) than children who live in a single-parent family (Krauss, 2006). In this study, this concern is addressed to gauge the level and effect of religious practices.

Adolescent Religiosity In Felda Pahang

Fariza et al. (2008) explain that behaviour is regarded as an element contained in the definition of moral character (*akhlaq*) besides other elements such as moral, temperament and habit. Thus, a study of adolescent behaviour covers one aspect in the building of human character which brings out positive or negative changes. In the Islamic perspective, there are four main components in the building of character to create religiosity in man's psyche, mainly, faith or belief (*aqidah*), worship (*ibadah*), moral character (*akhlaq*) and personality (Abdullah Naseh Ulwan, 1994; Mohd Ismail, 2005). Thus, visible action is known as behaviour and it determines whether human character is good or bad. This means that character (*akhlaq*) may be interpreted through a person's negative or positive pattern of behaviour. This is in line with Al-Ghazali's (1988) explanation that good character consists of acts which come from the individual's soul and which accord with reason and religion. On the contrary, acts which contradict reason and religion make bad character.

This research focuses on the religiosity of

adolescents from single-parent families who live in the FELDA (Federal Land Development Authority) settlement of Wilayah Jengka also known as *Lembaga Kemajuan Tanah Persekutuan (LKTP)*. As justification, adolescents in this area are selected as respondents because they are the second or third generation of the family unit at FELDA between the ages of 15 to 17 years. The location of the clustered settlement and the common characteristics in culture, environment and religion render the atmosphere of upbringing and socialization of FELDA adolescents very different from other adolescents.

The FELDA settlement was explored as a plantation by the explorers decades ago and was categorised as a rural area. FELDA is a Malaysian government agency which manages re-settlement of poor rural inhabitants to a newly developed area in order to raise their economic status. This agency focuses on opening farms for small farmers to grow cash crops. FELDA schemes are specifically for Malays who form the majority of the Malaysian population (www.scribd.com). The research location is at FELDA Wilayah Jengka which was founded in the year 1967 and is the oldest and largest FELDA land scheme in Malaysia situated in the state of Pahang. It is known as the Jengka Triangle because its location sits on the three districts of Temerloh, Jerantut and Maran comprising 25 FELDA land schemes (Sulong, 1985).

Thus, this research is conducted to study the religiosity and level of religious practice among adolescents from FELDA in Pahang to prevent involvement in immoral activities. Research findings show that there is a higher level of religiosity in rural areas as compared to urban areas (Krauss et al., 2006). FELDA areas are categorised as a rural area (Salahuddin Yusuf, 2015). Objectively, religiosity enables the balancing between emotional and thought development in terms of adolescent social activity.

Methodology

A total of 30 secondary school students aged sixteen years old in FELDA Jengka area have been selected as research respondents. These adolescents come from single parent families due to the death of one parent or divorce of parents who are pioneers at FELDA Wilayah Jengka, Daerah Maran, Pahang. They have been selected through purposive sampling with specified respondent characteristics for this research. A set of questionnaires was constructed to identify religiosity and level of religious behaviour among respondents. It focuses on manners (*adab*) and moral character (*akhlaq*) towards Allah, specifically relating to performing worship (*ibadah*), not doing acts which contradict Islamic teachings and values, and being righteous and God-conscious. The measurement instrument for the questionnaire has been modified by the researcher and constructed based on standards taken from Islamic Practice Instrument (IPI) (Fariza, 2012) to measure the appreciation level for Islamic practice among Muslim adolescents. IPI has been proven in operating the elements of validity and high reliability of questionnaire items which study religiosity of adolescents. To explain research findings, a descriptive statistical analysis is applied to identify information in the form of frequency, percentage and mean.

Results & Discussion

Out of 29 items of religiosity or religious behaviours listed in Table 1 above, the religious practice conducted by respondents that scored the highest percentage is keeping away from gambling, that is 83% representing 25 persons. In addition, there are two items frequently conducted by respondents, first is perform prayers five times a day and second, contented with sustenance provided by Allah (s.w.t), which recorded 40% representing 12 persons.

Next, the highest score for religious practice which is sometimes conducted by respondents is praying in congregation at 50% representing

Table 1: Religious Behaviour of Adolescents

No	Item	Never		Seldom		Some-times		Frequent		Always		Total		Mean
		K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	K	%	
1	Perform 5-times a day prayers			6	20	8	27	12	40	4	13	30	100	3.47
2	Pray on time			8	27	12	40	7	23	3	10	30	100	3.17
3	Pray in congregation			4	13	15	50	5	17	6	20	30	100	3.43
4	Complete fasting in Ramadhan (except if legally excused)	2	6.7	4	13	5	17	6	20	13	43	30	100	3.8
5	Replace fasting days missed			5	17	3	10	7	23	9	30	30	100	3.27
6	Read al-Quran daily	5	17	7	23	12	40	2	6.7	4	13	30	100	2.77
7	Perform optional Tahiyatul Masjid prayers	10	33	11	37	5	17	2	6.7	2	6.7	30	100	2.17
8	Respect people who are praying	1	3.3	5	17	6	20	11	37	7	23	30	100	3.6
9	Keep cleanliness of masjid / surau (public prayer place)	2	6.7	7	23	3	10	9	30	9	30	30	100	3.53
10	Supplicate facing direction of Qiblah			2	6.7	6	20	7	23	15	50	30	100	4.17
11	Zikr (meditation on Allah) softly without disturbing others	1	3.3	4	13	10	33	6	20	9	30	30	100	3.6
12	Perform Ablution (wudhuk) according to rules (rukun)			4	13	7	23	8	27	11	37	30	100	3.87
13	Not talking while taking ablution			6	20	8	27	8	27	8	27	30	100	3.6
14	Contentment with sustenance given by Allah			2	6.7	5	17	12	40	11	37	30	100	4.07
15	Utilise Allah's favours properly			4	13	10	33	9	30	7	23	30	100	3.63
16	Donate when charity collection is organized	1	3.3	11	37	5	17	5	17	8	27	30	100	3.27
17	Fulfill a trust			4	13	13	43	7	23	6	20	30	100	3.5
18	Fulfill a promise			5	17	10	33	10	33	5	17	30	100	3.5
19	Keep away from self-pride (takkabur) for own charity	2	6.7	4	13	9	30	8	27	7	23	30	100	3.47
20	Keep away from downplaying others' good deeds	1	3.3	6	20	8	27	8	27	7	23	30	100	3.47
21	Feel awe for Allah's power			1	3.3	3	10	5	17	21	70	30	100	4.53
22	Always think good of Allah					1	3.3	6	20	23	77	30	100	4.73
23	Trust in Allah (tawakkal)			3	10	8	27	9	30	10	33	30	100	3.87
24	Stop doing sinful acts	1	3.3	8	27	12	40	7	23	2	6.7	30	100	3.03

15 persons. Two items of religiosity which are seldom conducted shared the same number of 11 persons represented by 37%, are the practices of performing optional Tahiyatul Masjid prayers and giving to charity. Furthermore, the highest percentage for religious practice which is never done by respondents is optional Tahiyatul Masjid prayers, represented by 10 persons or 33 % of all respondents.

Analysis in terms of mode (score which is frequent and most) shows the religious practice which is the mode for persons who reply "always" is keeping away from gambling, specifically 25 persons or 83%; the mode for "frequent" is praying 5 times a day and contented with sustenance from Allah, that is 40% or 12 persons. Next, the mode for "sometimes" is praying in congregation, that

is 15 persons or 50%. The reply for mode “seldom” which records 11 persons or 37% is performing optional Tahiyatul masjid prayer and giving to charity. Furthermore, the mode for respondents who reply “never” is performing optional Tahiyatul Masjid prayers specifically 10 persons or 33 %. For other practices which record the highest percentage is keeping away from fornication (*zina*) and doing supplication facing the direction of the *Qibla*.

In addition, the research findings also revealed only five religious practices that have the lowest percentage, 1 person or 3.3% in the category “never”, specifically, respect for people praying, *zikr* softly without disturbing others, donate when charity collection is organised, keep away from downplaying others’ good deeds and stop committing sinful acts. This shows that not many adolescents have a problem with religiosity and their low level of religiosity is not serious.

In this research, the score range in table 2 is based on IPI-Fariza 2012 standards as modified by the researcher by dividing into three score levels. The score range begins with 29 (29 x 1) to 145 (29 x 5). The score 107-145 is the highest, medium score is 68-106 and the lowest score is 29-67. Research finds that the highest percentage for religious practice is at medium level, i.e. 53.34%, (16 persons). And the high level scores 46.66% (14 persons) while there is no score for the low level.

Table 2: Score in Religiosity Level of Adolescents

Score	N=30	Percentage (%)
Low (29-67)	0	0
Medium (68-106)	16	53.34 %
High (107-145)	14	46.66 %
Total		100 %

Generally, the level of religiosity of adolescents is at medium high in view of the score for high level is almost equal to the score for medium level.

Research findings show that the level of religiosity of respondents is due to adolescent commitment to religious obligations which act as protection or prevention from committing immoral deeds. This conclusion corresponds with an explanation by McCullough et al., (2003) that religiosity is measured by various indicators including frequent attendance of religious sessions, consistent prayers and positive attitude in fulfilling religious obligations.

Questionnaire data shows that majority of respondents (83%) are not involved in gambling and fornication (*zina*) which are both considered as characteristics of risky behaviour in rural adolescents. This finding accords with the findings of a study by Hidayah et al., (2003) which report a low percentage for adolescents involved in gambling, that is 22 persons (2.7%) and in fornication (*zina*), at 2 persons (0.2%) out of 815 adolescents. This statement corresponds with the finding of a study by Welte et al., (2011) which asserts that most adolescents do not get involved in gambling. Instead, it finds that drinking alcohol is increasingly widespread among adolescents.

Respondents’ commitment in religiosity results in keeping them away from gambling which would have bad effects on the personal and social life, and the environment of respondents (Raisamo et al., 2013). The inclination to gamble develops during adolescence (Slutske et al., 2003) and adolescents are the group most at risk to be involved in gambling (Messerlian et al., 2007). However, there are studies which associate gambling by adolescents as a way for them to cope with emotional stress and depression (Blanco et al., 2006; Dannon et al., 2006; Wood & Griffiths, 2007; Nower et al. 2004).

A previous study also finds that gambling is one of the early behavioural problems detected at about the age of 14 besides the habit of drinking alcohol (Barnes et al., 2009). Further, other past studies have also proven that gambling and drinking alcohol are closely interrelated (Grant et

al., 2002; Potenza et al., 2002; Welte et al., 2004) in negative actions such as in demanding and triggering an attack on others in psychological, physical and sexual terms (Brasfield et al., 2012). Furthermore, those who have the problem of gambling (addiction) will increase the risk of violent behaviour and vice-versa, that is, those who show violent behaviour will increase the risk of being involved in gambling (Afifi et al., 2009).

Besides alcohol addiction, gambling is one of the causative factors for social problems if an adolescent is excessively involved in gambling, even though the effect of gambling is not as bad as for alcohol addiction (Susanna et al., 2013). Previous studies report that gambling is associated with various factors such as disruption in social relationships, drug addiction, delinquency and crime (Hardoon et al., 2004) truancy, social problems (Splevins et al., 2010) and having various problems in managing their lives, in comparison to those who do not gamble (Bergevin et al., 2000).

Conclusion

This research generally shows a medium-high level of religiosity among adolescents of single-parent families. It concludes that adolescents are still committed in adhering to Islamic teachings and fulfilling religious obligations although a minority of them are found in breach of religious prohibitions. This research also finds that most adolescents keep away from committing sinful and negative acts such as gambling and fornication (*zina*) which are major sins in Islam. Furthermore, in terms of behaviour concerning worship (*ibadah*) and manners (*adab*) towards Allah, most adolescents fulfill the obligatory five times a day prayers, trust in Allah (*tawakkal*), feel awe for Allah's power (*taqwa*) and always supplicate (*doa*) facing the direction of *Qibla*. This proves that religiosity can play a meaningful role in fortifying against worsening of human behaviour.

However, there are adolescents who are found

to be involved in social ills and inconsistent in fulfilling their religious obligations. Perhaps, it is due to their lack of appreciation for Islamic teachings that their faith is still not strong, thus requiring continuous guidance, particularly adolescents who do not have a father or mother. The absence of a father or mother in nurturing and guidance may affect upbringing and appreciation of Islamic teachings of children because the father or mother is the closest and best person for the children. Adolescents in single-parent families suffer the loss of an important part in their lives because they do not enjoy sufficient love and affection as well as attention and upbringing in comparison to their peers who have both parents.

What is worrying is that such adolescents may end up in immoral activities with negative elements if their irreligious behaviour is not handled with a religious approach. Therefore, parents, the Malaysian Ministry of Education, schools, missionary organizations, counselors, non-governmental organizations, government agencies and local communities need to work in collaboration to reach out to adolescents through the religious approach. A psychological approach such as motivation, moral support, advisory, counseling and so on has to be applied according to the Islamic mold of Islamic psychology which evidently helps to build an excellent Muslim character and personality.

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