



Conversion Patterns among Mualafs at Pusat Bimbingan Islam Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'azam Syah Negeri Kedah Darul Aman (Pusba)

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to investigate the conversion patterns among mualafs in Malaysia. Its focus is to find out the demographic information of mualafs and to identify the popular conversion patterns among mualafs in Malaysia. Three (3) conversion patterns i.e. intellectual, mystical and affectional are being investigated in this study. Data collection was done at PUSBA, Kedah whereby mualafs from all states were gathered. A total of 42 responses were collected from these mualafs using a census study method. This study found that majority of the respondents were Sabahan and came from other races such as Iban, Asli, Myanmar, Kadazan and Thai. More than half of the respondents were unemployed but most of the mualafs had an adequate academic level. Results showed that majority of the mualafs were influenced by someone who are close to them which is linked to the affectional conversion pattern. It is hoped that this study will provide insights to JAKIM in terms of conversion patterns among the mualafs in Malaysia.

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Introduction

Islam, Christianity, Buddhism and Hinduism are among the many religions in this world. What drives people to convert to Islam? It is due to Islam and Al-Quran is able to give enough evidence to justify the truth of its message by providing logical reasoning and examples ("What drives people to convert", 2008).

As mentioned in the Al-Marbawi Dictionary, the word mualaf comes from two root words i.e. 'Allafa' which means 'submissive, tamed, obedient' and 'Alifahu' which means 'compliant'. The combination of the two root words gives the definition of the word mualaf which means 'to change or make somebody change his / her religion / beliefs. According to the Cambridge International Dictionary of English, the term 'convert' means "someone who changes their beliefs or ways of living". In the multiracial country Malaysia, Muslim converts are also known as mualafs. According to Webster's New World College Dictionary 'conversion' refers to "a converting or being converted: specifically, a) a change from lack of faith to religious belief, adoption of a religion" and "b) a change from one's belief, religion, doctrine, opinion, etc. to another." According to McGuire (1997), "conversion is a process of religious change which transforms 'the way the individual perceives the rest of society and his or her personal place in it, altering one's view of the world.'"

The six (6) conversion patterns by Lofland & Skonovd (1981), describe the process of conversion from one religion to another; a) intellectual; 'response to teaching' (Kose,1994) through reading, media, talks, b) affectional; through having good and positive personal experience with members of the Muslim society, c) mystical; through visions and supernatural

experiences, d) experimental; going through the process of trial and error in the religion of choices, e) revivalist; conforming to the crowd; involving emotional inspirations (Inaba, 2004); and f) coercive; through pressure. Meanwhile, Poston (1992) came up with four (4) factors of conversion: "example and imitation, the desire to follow out a moral idea, teachings of Islam and extra-cult-affective-bonds". While Abdul Wadod Shalabi (2005) further added three (3) common factors that lead to the decision to convert to Islam: "direction and discipline, lack of a priesthood and racial equality". However, Dawson (1990) suggested that conversion process is 'a mixed type' of those patterns. In 1992, Bainbridge pointed out two (2) theories on religious conversion ie; a) strain theory, b) social influence theory, and Lofland/Stark (1965) conversion model brings about both of the theories.

In Kose's (1994) study on 70 English Muslim converts, it was found that the most common conversion patterns among them were the affectional, intellectual and experimental. Among the three, most respondents associated their conversion with the affectional and intellectual patterns.

Materials and Methods

This research was carried out among the new mualafs from all states in Malaysia, within a specific term, who congregated at the Pusat Bimbingan Islam Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'azam Syah Negeri Kedah Darul Aman (PUSBA). This study seeks to investigate the conversion patterns among these mualafs.

Data Collection

Generally, census study is utilized in this research where 42 mualafs were involved. Based on the quantitative approach, the questionnaire was administered to the population of new mualafs to gather data on their conversion patterns. The

questionnaire covered the demographic details and all the six conversion patterns (Lofland & Skonovd, 1981). However, the most common patterns reported by the 42 respondents in our study were; a) Intellectual, b) Mystical and c) Affectional. The team of researchers personally distributed the questionnaire to the respondents. Each part of the questionnaire was explained by the researchers to the respondents to ensure the respondents understood the questions. The questionnaire was read to the respondents who had difficulties reading the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Morgan, Leech, and Barret (2005) defined data analysis as a process of classification, summarizing, organizing and manipulating data received from the respondents. The data analysis involved in this study only emphasized on the descriptive analysis.

Results and Discussion

Descriptive Analysis

Majority of the respondents were from Sabah (9, 21.4 percent), followed by other states such as Selangor, Kedah and Perak (7, 16.7 percent) respectively, Sarawak (6, 14.3 percent) respectively, Kuala Lumpur (3, 7.1 percent), Kelantan (2, 4.8 percent), Johor (1, 2.4 percent) (refer Table 1).

This study had a total population of 42 respondents; among them 21 respondents were males and 21 females (refer Table 2). 28 respondents (66.7 percent) came from other races such as Iban, Asli, Myanmar, Kadazan and Thai. 11 respondents (26.2 percent) were Indians, while Chinese comprised of 3 respondents (7.1 percent) (refer table 3).

As for the occupations of the respondents, more than half of the respondents (23, 54 percent) were unemployed, while 17 respondents (40.5 percent) chose others and 2 respondents (4.8 percent) were self employed (refer Table 4). None of the respondents' were academicians (Teachers, Lecturers), Professionals (Lawyers, Accountants, Doctors) or involved in agriculture. This is due to the fact that new mualafs have to undergo 3 months of Islamic Teachings Programme at PUSBA. According to the officer in charge at PUSBA, those having jobs (not self-employed) were unable to take 3 months leave in order to participate in the programme.

As for the academic level of the respondents, 18 respondents (42.9 percent) had Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia / Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (Vokasional) qualification, 11 (26.2 percent) had other qualifications (4 had no education at all, 3 had Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia, 2 gave no specific answer, 1 had Pusat Giat MARA education and 1 had a level-3 Thailand secondary school education), 8 (19.0 percent) had Ujian Penilaian Sekolah Rendah qualification, 2 (4.8 percent) had a Diploma / Certificate and 1 (2.4 percent) had Sijil Rendah Pelajaran / Penilaian Menengah Rendah qualification (refer Table 5). This result shows that most of the new mualafs are literate.

Regarding the first source of information where the respondents obtained information regarding Islam. 11 respondents (26.2 percent) received their first information regarding Islam from other sources (2 through marriage, 1 through fiancée, 1 from religious persons, 1 through dream, 1 through 'hidayah', 1 through love, 2 through 'azan', 2 gave no response, 10 respondents (23.8 percent) obtained the information from their families, 7 (16.7 percent) from friends, 4 respondents (9.5 percent) obtained the information from books and the media and from their close friends respectively, 3 respondents (7.1 percent) received the information from events, 2 (4.8 percent)

from colleagues, and only 1 (2.4 percent) from the neighbour (refer Table 6). This finding is in accordance with the study conducted by Poston (1992), where forty-three (43) out of seventy-two respondents (60 percent) agreed that a Muslim friend or an acquaintance had an influence in their decision to convert.

As for the type of conversion pattern related to the respondent's conversion process to Islam, 29 respondents (69.0 percent) associated their conversion process with the intellectual pattern as strong while 13 (30.9 percent) regarded it as weak while 26 respondents (61.9 percent) associated their conversion process with the mystical pattern as weak while 16 respondents (38.1 percent) regarded it as strong. As for the affectional pattern, 35 respondents (83.3 percent) regarded it as strong while 7 respondents (16.7 percent) regarded it as weak (refer Table 7).

Conclusion

From the study conducted, the following conclusions can be derived: a) majority of the mualafs come from Sabah and belongs to other races found in Malaysia such as Iban, Asli, Myanmar, Kadazan and Thai, b) many of them are unemployed despite having adequate academic level, c) majority of the new mualafs agree that they get the first source of information regarding Islam from people who are close to them like family members, friends, colleagues and neighbours, d) majority of the new mualafs associate their conversion process with the affectional pattern, followed by the intellectual pattern and lastly the mystical pattern. This coincides with the first source of information they obtain regarding Islam.

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Table 1: State

State	Frequency	Percentage
Kedah	7	16.7
Selangor	7	16.7
Kuala Lumpur	3	7.1
Johor	1	2.4
Kelantan	2	4.8
Sabah	9	21.4
Sarawak	6	14.3
Perak	7	16.7

Table 2: Gender

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	21	50.00
Female	21	50.00
Total	42	100.0

Table 3: Race

Race	Frequency	Percentage
Indian	11	26.2
Chinese	3	7.1
Others	28	66.7
Total	42	100.00

Table 4: Occupation

Types	Frequency	Percentage
Self-Employed	2	4.8
Unemployed	23	54.8
Others	17	40.5
Total	42	100.0

Table 5: Academic level of respondents

Types	Frequency	Percentage
UPSR	8	19
SRP/PMR	1	2.4
SPM/SPVM	18	42.9
Certificate/Diploma	2	4.8
Others	11	26.2
Total	42	100.0

Table 6: First information regarding Islam

Types	Frequency	Percentage
Family	10	23.8
Friends	7	16.7
Close Friends	4	9.5
Colleagues	2	4.8
Neighbours	1	2.4
Book & Media (TV, radio, internet, newspaper)	4	9.5
Events	3	7.1
Others	11	26.2
Total	42	100.0

Table 7: Conversion Patterns

Patterns	Intellectual		Mystical		Affectional	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Very Weak	6	14.3	13	31	3	7.1
Somewhat Weak	3	7.1	9	21.4	1	2.4
Weak	4	9.5	4	9.5	3	7.1
Strong	9	21.4	5	11.9	6	14.3
Somewhat strong	8	19.0	3	7.1	12	28.6
Very Strong	12	28.6	8	19	17	40.5
Total	42	100.0	42	100.0	42	100.0