

Adaptation Strategies by Muslim Convert: A Study on “Saudara Kita” in Sarawak Malaysia

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Abstract

The “Saudara Kita” is a term for the non-Malay Islamic community comprising various races and ethnicities in Sarawak, Malaysia. This term helps to identify the convert groups in Sarawak. This study was conducted to explore adaptation strategies used by Muslim converts in Sarawak. This qualitative research involved five participants who have converted to Islam for more than 5 years and reside in Sarawak. The data collection method used semi-structured interviews and data analyzed used thematic analysis. The research findings indicate five main themes arose for the adaptation strategies among Muslim converts, which are (1) exploring inner and outer challenges, (2) challenge adaptation strategies, (3) adaptation needs, (4) support system, and (5) exploring the role of counselors. The increase in the number of Islam converts in Sarawak each year requires exploration of challenge adaptations to plan developmental da’wah programs for Muslim converts, to enhance their Islamic faith. The objective of this program is to build a solid identity for Muslim converts so that they will be consistent in practicing the Islamic way of life. Governments in the Sarawak region can make programs in order to improve the knowledge, skills, and adaptation of converts in Sarawak. So that converts can have support from the government to carry out activities and worship in accordance with Islamic life.

INTRODUCTION

Malaysian Muslims use “Saudara Kita.” The Islamic Council of Sarawak calls converts to Islam “Saudara Kita” (Amiranadira, 2018; Muhamat et al., 2013). Sarawak does not set a time limit for converts or mualaf for “Saudara Kita” to indicate that our brothers are well-cared for (Borneo, 2017). This phrase reflects the closeness of Muslim converts’ friendship with Sarawak’s Islamic community (Kawi et al., 2020; Mohamad, 2013). Mualaf are non-Muslims who converted to Islam (Abd Majid et al., 2016). According to the YDP Majlis Islam Sarawak’s declaration in the Utusan Borneo newspaper 13 March 2014, non-Malaysians in Sarawak convert to Islam by 1,500 persons per year, even though Islam is a minority religion. In 2020, Sarawak has Christian (50.11%), Islam (34.18%), Buddhist (12.82%), Hindu (0.14%), other religions (0.55%), atheist (1.52%), and unknown (0.68%) religions. Thus, this study must examine Sarawakian Muslim converts’ challenge adaptation strategies.

In Issues on Internal and External Challenges experienced by Saudara Kita in Sarawak (Rahman et al., 2020). Our “Saudara Kita” face psychological and spiritual pressures and difficulties adjusting to their new surroundings after embracing Islam. External challenges

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include severe family opposition, such as being isolated, excluded, social relations, and financial assistance being removed; intentionally making it difficult for "Saudara Kita" to convert to Islam in the hopes that the hardship will force new converts to return to their original religion (Ai & Sham, 2009). This indicates how severe their refusal is, as some are exiled from their families and lose their inheritance rights for betraying their forefathers' religion.

Most Sarawakian Muslims convert to Islam for peace, instruction from Allah S.W.T., or to marry a Malay-Islamic partner (Amiranadira, 2018). Muslim converts without independence must return to their families after the syahadah ceremony. According to Ai & Sham (2009), early converts to Islam experience psychological issues. Because they're not ready to talk about their new religion, they have to face the strain at home. Those who want to get married will also follow their future partner back to their family home, which can be awkward when surrounded by strangers.

Thus, in 2017, the Selangor Islamic Religious Council established a special protection center for converts (Baitus Salam) as a temporary shelter and advice center to help new Muslims keep their religion (Adenan et al., 2020). Sarawak must also establish a separate protection center to help our new Muslims build their identities. Muslim converts without help will face psychological difficulties that may jeopardize their Islamic journey (Buliet, 2013). Their inner conflict to adjust to the new environment can cause conflict (Kassim et al., 2013). Differences in faith with parents might produce terrible inner battles (Kassim et al., 2013). Another custody dispute between converts and their non-Muslim partners caught the media's notice and had a bad influence on converts (Kassim et al., 2013).

Struggling Muslim converts will regret their decision. Depressed, they mistrust Islam. High-level cross-cultural counselors are their only hope. The therapy method should consider all groups' socio-political and identity-building demands, including how impressions and prejudices (repression) affect their target's identity transformation (Vontress, 1971).

Muslim converts struggle before converting. Converts must acclimatize to Islam. Muslim converts must endure psychological stress from good or bad emotions to adjust to this obstacle (Vontress, 1971). It's hard to adapt to sharia law, such as preserving sex limits, protecting aurah (genital shame), eating halal food, praying five times, and following the customs and culture of people who follow the law of syarak exclusively (Awang et al., 2017). Sharia law allows property ownership through grants, wills, and *faraid* (Baharudin & Said, 2017). Legal rights where converts and their non-Muslim relatives disagree on parental rights, child custody, and the child's religion (Khan & Samuri, 2022). Malaysian converts must know this.

Rationale of Current Study

This study chronicled Sarawak Muslim converts' hardships and successes. Certified counselors assist Muslim converts adapt in this study. This study enhances Muslim conversion mentoring. Malaysian Muslim converts' challenges were studied more than their accomplishments. Converts deal with child custody, wills, heirs, and marital property (Khan & Samuri, 2022). Da'wah to Muslim minorities is equally difficult (Imanuddin et al., 2021). Thus, this study tries to comprehend Sarawaki Muslim converts who have surmounted challenges after converting to Islam and use their experiences to create a character-building module for new "saudara kita" in Sarawak.

Purpose of the Study

Figure 1 (see appendix) shows the framework of this study, which includes sharing the experiences of Muslim converts who have long converted to Islam, how they face internal and external challenges, perfecting the challenges adaptation needs, choosing a support system, and sharing views on the needs for counsellors in the "Saudara Kita" unit in Sarawak. This qualitative study collects as much data as possible for a thorough analysis (Cohen et al., 2002).

Themed analysis examined the study's findings. After data collection, it is coded and presented as themes and sub-themes that require additional analysis (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). Qualitative research explored individuals' unmeasured experiences. This permits study participants to be heard personally, extensively, and thoroughly without predetermined restrictions and options. Qualitative researchers analyse participant data to determine its significance (Connelly & Peltzer, 2016). This study examines Muslim converts who overcame obstacles to become authentic Muslims.

Literature of Study

Guidance and Education

Muslim converts before adopting hope to continue learning about Islam even though they realize it will be difficult due to the uncertain situation (Krstić, 2009). To fully grasp and practice Islamic beliefs, converts to Islam need particular educational programs (Winchester, 2008). According to Rambo (1993), classroom-based teaching can increase religious understanding among good converts. Careful curriculum planning for converts is needed to maximize learning (Bakar & Ismail, 2018). Our brothers and sisters' early guiding classes focus on taharah, practical prayers, monotheism, and sirah or surah instances. Sirah is a surah in the Qur'an that describes the Prophet SAW's mission (Abdelaal & Md Rashid, 2015; Al-Mubarakfuri, 2020). Adjusting the learning session to converts' capacities helps them understand.

Welfare and Finance

Muslim converts will feel unhappy, worried, and afraid since they will lose some of their things. The majority's discrimination might cause converts' despair, fear, and anxiety (Rippy & Newman, 2006). Before converting to Islam, spouses and parents sometimes disagree about property rights and restrictions (Khan & Samuri, 2022). If there is no ongoing support and counseling, new converts will swiftly abandon their religion. After becoming Muslims, their family also hate them (Abd Rahman et al., 2016; Rahman et al., 2020).

The Issue of Muslim Converts' Support System in Sarawak

Muslim converts will be better at practicing their religion if they get good support and are guided with patience (Tan & Pao, 2007). This relationship strengthens the da'wah program and provides support and development to improve identification among new Muslim converts in Malaysia (Bakar & Ismail, 2018).

Counsellor Service Issues

New Muslim converts need trained counselors to cope with personal and external issues (Jayos & Jasmi, 2013). Thus, apostasy-attempting Islam converts need counseling (Siti & Ismail, 2017). New Muslim converts assigned for counseling should be reminded to accept Allah's will (Hamjah, 2010). A new client requires a counsellor's multifaceted talents (Shuaib, 2003). To fulfill the demands of varied clients, including newly converted clients, the counsellor service system must be improved (Jayos & Jasmi, 2013). PERKIM is a leading NGO that counsels new converts (Noh, 2010).

Cross-Cultural/Multi-Cultural Counselling

Multicultural counseling helps minorities form ethnic/cultural identities (Atkinson et al., 1979; Cross, 2001; Cross et al., 1971; Cross, 1995; Helms, 1984, 1995). Sibling clients require attention from cross-cultural counselors (Kim, 1981). The therapy method should consider all groups' socio-political and identity-building demands, including how impressions and prejudices (repression) affect their target's identity transformation (Vontress, 1971).

METHODS

Population and the methods of sampling

This study included five Sarawak Islamic Religion Office-registered Muslim converts. Female key informant. Participants are Muslim converts who have converted to Islam for five years or more, have acclimated to Islamic practices, are active in NGO or volunteer work linked with our "Saudara Kita" programs, and understand the function of counselors. This study includes 5 Sarawak Muslim sisters. To protect participants' identities, P1, P2, P3, P4, and P5 were used as pseudonyms. Participants averaged 33–64 years old. Iban, Chinese, Melanau, Bidayuh, and Kayan Sarawakians participated. Christian before Islam. [Table 1](#) (see appendix) provides study participants' demographics. [Table 2](#) lists the primary informant's motivations for turning to Islam (see appendix in [Table 2](#)).

Instrumentation

Interactive, semi-structured, face-to-face, and casual data collection was done utilizing 18 questions. Researchers conducted 40–60-minute participant meetings. The researchers verbatim transcribed the audio tape for qualitative data analysis. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, all interviews were conducted at the JAIS counseling booth on level 13 and followed SOPs. Pilot experiments employed expert-reviewed interview questions. However, the pilot study improved temporal questions. Participants' responses prompted impromptu inquiries. [Table 3](#) lists meeting guiding questions (see appendix in [table 3](#)).

Procedures of Research

Telephone consent was sought from study participants before the interviews. Participants signed consent forms and participant notifications before the interview. The study's goal and confidentiality were explained to participants. As a thank you for their time, participants received telekung sets after the interview. Women pray in telekung hoods ([Zainun et al., 2020](#)).

Interview Process

Semi-structured, face-to-face, relaxed interviews with 18 questions collected data. The researcher performed 40–60-minute participant interviews. The researcher transcribed qualitative data recordings verbatim. Due to the COVID-19 epidemic, all interviews were held at the JAIS counseling room on level 13 and followed SOP. Experts examined and improved the pilot research interview questions. The pilot study enhanced the interview questions. Based on participants' answers, spontaneous questions are asked.

Analysis Plan

The study's objective was to explore participants' experiences and how they overcame obstacles to become real Muslims through thematic analysis. After thematic analysis, comparable topics should be combined ([Braun & Clarke, 2006](#)). Hemed analysis yielded obvious and relevant themes connected to the study's aims, which were used to write a report.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers found 4 major themes and 9 minor themes from the data gathered from the interview transcripts. The summary of the themes is in [Table 3](#) (see appendix).

Theme 1: Adaptation towards internal and external challenges after converting to Islam

This study indicated that Muslims overcame internal and external obstacles. The findings implies Muslim converts can overcome family difficulties. Research participants indicated their inner power helped them overcome significant conversion hurdles. Minor themes demonstrate

research participants controlled their emotions and turned challenges into social support, helping their parents, family, and society to develop them into real Muslims.

Inner Strength

This study found that participants were able to replace their negative emotions with remorse for making their families upset by converting. P1.

“...After switching to Islam, I feel unhappy, anxious, and scared. I understand the sensation, but when I reflect back and my heart screams, I have to rise up and believe my decision”. (P1).

P2 felt emancipated because she knew her father hated Islam and expected his reaction. P2 worked and lived alone during her conversion. She resolved situations this way.

“..... I walked out of my parents' home and lived on my own since my father was a staunch Christian who detested Islam...” (P2)

P4 countered with patience. She stayed with her family after converting to Islam since she had nowhere else to go. She convinced herself that Allah S.W.T. was testing her despite her anguish.

“.... I lived with my elder brother and had to be patient even though I was sad. I went back to my kampong house every week, frightened and scared, but I trusted in Allah S.W.T to keep me safe. I prayed the whole way back to the kampong. I ignored scolding. After a year, they accepted my Islamization...” (P4).

P5's early conversion as a wife was complicated. She blamed her non-Muslim husband. She failed to convert her husband to Islam. Her husband supported her Islamization.

“...Sad and depressing. I became Muslim alone. anxiety-ridden I was married. He refused to convert to Islam with me. Months of crying... I enticed... I converted to Islam against his refusal” (P5)

P3 shared a different experience. She did not receive any opposition from her family, but her challenge was in finding religious guidance classes.

“I just felt despair, stress, and dread after converting to Islam. I am Islam now, who would teach me the religion? I considered leaving the kampong, but I was working and helping my family, and we had a hard existence” (P3).

Social Support

Problems remind us of family. Muslim converts face their parents' wrath. Early Islam hesitancy is transient, according to research. The families accepted their Muslim-convert offspring. P1 and P2 family members urged research participants to study Islam.

“My family insulted and expelled me when I converted to Islam. but now they don't mind, my youngest sibling and elder brother also

converted to Islam after I did, and when we travel back to kampong, my mum reminds us to pray or solat." (P1).

"My conversion to Islam initially angered them. When they learned I had converted, they were sad but did nothing. They reminded me to fully practice Islam if I converted..." (P2).

"My family supported it. Though non-Muslim, they accepted. My brothers and family are Muslim due to marriage" (P3).

"I maintained cool and visited my family monthly after they secluded me. Eventually, they accepted me..." (P4).

"Anti, convert. My husband told me, 'I won't do it.' He wouldn't object if I converted to Islam, but he wouldn't follow me.." (P5).

Non-Muslim Sarawak has Muslim kampongs since 1970. Iban Muslims in Simunjan District, Bidayuh in Padawan District, Tebedu and Bau, Melanau in Dalat District, Balingian, and Orang Ulu in Long Busang and Sungai Asap/Koyan, Belaga have such kampongs. Peaceful worship. P1 said her Muslim friends supported her and her non-Muslim friends knew about her Islam conversion.

"... My Malay and non-Muslim friends supported me, gave me money, and helped me find work when I converted to Islam since they knew I had always been interested in Islam". (P1)

An almost similar experience was shared by P2 who moved from Miri to Kuching to study deeply about the Islam religion with the help from her Malay friends.

".... From the moment I converted, my Malay friends supported me. Even my father stayed with me" (P2).

P5 said her non-Muslim family did not oppose her conversion because they had a good relationship from the start. They still care.

"...My family has always supported me. Kindness matters to them, not religion. I still talk to my ex-husband..." (P5).

In this matter Nur A'thiroh Masyaa'il Tan (2007), believes Muslim converts will have a better religious experience if they receive good support and are guided patiently.

Theme 2: Challenge adaptation strategies after converting to Islam

Our new Muslim brothers and sisters are ready to face hardships when they convert. Muslim converts who received hidayah or calling from Allah S.W.T are mentally equipped and have techniques to adjust to obstacles through their remarkable thought patterns.

Thought Patterns

Success-minded people think differently. This research found that the individuals' outstanding thought habits helped them convert to Islam. The cognitive patterns include self-

confidence, not giving up easily, independence, good intentions, utilizing challenge as incentive, self-initiative, and motivated to learn;

Self-confidence and Not Giving Up Easily

“Before converting to Islam, I was confident in myself and believed that "giving up" will not be a part of me...” (P1)

Independent

“...When I moved to Kuching, I asked where I could learn to recite the Quran. They answered Jalan Astana, Petra. I'd find out from work or vacation. Knowledge requires independence.” (P2)

Challenge as motivation and early intentions to convert to Islam

“Yes, learning about Islam will help us become authentic Muslims despite the hardships. I found that preparation and early intentions to convert to Islam are the actual challenges.” (P3)

Self-awareness

“Self-awareness. Self-awareness is the only way to improve without outside support.” (P3)

Motivated in seeking knowledge

“... After becoming Muslim, I studied solat (prayers) in class and at home by photocopying the steps on A3 paper and putting them on my wall towards the kiblat. selepas masuk Islam, saya menguasai aaa solat, belajar di kelas, then di rumah saya terpaksa fotostatekan cara-cara solat tu saiz A3 dan lekat ke dinding arah kiblat, then ikutlah. Driven people can learn Al-Quran in two years.” (P4).

Positive

“... From my perspective, our strength and iman must be strong despite many challenges, temptations, and difficulties. Only if we can resist and stay positive will the learning process succeed.” (P4).

Learn with a teacher

“I attend USK Kuching, IIC, and religious activities once a month. You need a teacher to comprehend” (P5).

Support System

Protection Centres

Research participants used support system to justify Sarawak protective center for newly converted Muslims. Their families find early conversion sensitive. House them. Research participants said new Muslims can be alone. They want a Muslim convert protection center. Center new Muslims can assist each other emotionally. Centre programs enhance self-esteem. These results.;

“..... Since my husband's family knew I was evicted, I stayed with them. While waiting for my SPM results, I just knew Lundu and Bau and had no pals in Kuching. I stayed till my 2008 wedding” (P1).

"....Of course I was unhappy, frightened, and scared of my father, who was a staunch Christian and detested Islam, but I already converted to Islam, so I moved out of my dad's home and leased on my own. I learned how to solat, recite (the Qu'ran), and be joyful..." (P2)

"Needed temporary shelter. I remember staying at Batu 8 camp with my older brother. stayed a year because there was no other place despite my sadness." (P4).

The need for the centre is also supported by P3 and P5, even though when they converted, they had no issues with a place to stay. Their statements are as of below:

"Need it.... I've seen new Muslim converts who want to learn without looking, converts who disappeared because they had no place to go, they don't look for us either, after converting to Islam they just go their own way, those who converted because of marriage or had to marry because of sex out of wedlock don't even bother attending classes, even if we call them, they'll make excuses. They must attend such centers. They can just pray. they'll improve..." (P3).

"Important sister... I've been referred to in regards to new Muslim converts who have no place to stay after their family kicked them out after finding out they converted to Islam, some lost their homes because they couldn't afford rent, and some who seek medical attention at General Hospital from outside Kuching, we refer to JAIS only. request help... We can help if there's a center" (P5).

Religious programmes and classes

JAKIM, IIC, PERKIM, YADIM, YAYASAN IKHLAS, HIDAYAH CENTRE, and other NGOs and Islamic agencies in Sarawak help new Muslims. JAKIM manages Islamic religious matters in Malaysia (Hambali, 2020; Zuhri, 2016). HIKMAH, a 1970s Sarawak NGO, offers rural development. The Majlis Islam Sarawak and JAIS secretariat-registered Persatuan Urusetia Saudara Kita Sarawak runs programs in Sarawak. JAIS is under the Selangor State Secretary of State (SUK) (Sabilan et al., 2015; Wahab, 2002). Daies or volunteers lead religious guidance programs at these agencies and NGOs. Locally relevant programs. COVID-19 online classes. It's impossible without guidance. Researchers concur.

"Before becoming Muslim, my Muslim buddies taught me solat in primary school. Since I had memorized doas and understood Islam and Iman, I took classes when I converted. Before Covid, Ustaz Hafiz, daie Yayasan Ikhlas, taught me online recitation. Hehe." (P1).

"Kuching has several religious classes. Check your diligence. Muslim converts no longer need to find kampung teachers. Maybe they take classes elsewhere?(P3).

".... After saying the syahadah, I continued studying at JAIS because I had already started studying before converting. I also attended classes organized by MACMA, JAKIM, and IIC till now, when there are religious classes online." (P4)

“..... Fardu ain and Quran recitation sessions are among the many offline and online classes that can help new Muslims adjust to life as Muslims. Like they say... all at our fingertips...” (P5).

Theme 3. Necessary continuous support system for challenge adaptation for our Muslim converts

Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak

Sarawak Muslim converts are supported by *Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak* (JAIS). JAIS's Kemajuan Saudara Kita (KSK) Unit manages Urusetia Saudara Kita Sarawak's programs (USK). Nukaba Mualaf, a volunteer group, mentors new Muslims. USK volunteers form Nukaba Mualaf. This study includes USK members.

“I am a USK member for Kuching division and I am also a member Nukaba Mualaf” (P1)

“Ohhh I am a treasurer of USK Petra Jaya branch and I was elected as Nukaba Mualaf by JAIS just recently ... but I've been involved with the work even before elected” (P5).

“I am Nukaba Mualaf for Chinese Muslim, in USK I am a member of USK Samarahan division....” (P2)

“I've been an activit member of USK Kuching division since 1992, I've been a volunteer recitation teacher and I am recently elected as Nukaba Mualaf by JAIS...” (P3).

“I've been with USK Kuching for a long time, became a recitation teacher for Muslim converts since 2018 and also tasked as Nukaba Mualaf...” (P4).

Tabung Baitulmal Sarawak

Tabung Baitulmal Sarawak (TBS) is another very important support system as it is able to provide financial aids (Bakar et al., 2020; Harun & Ab Rahman, 2021; Kamarubahrin et al., 2019). USK volunteers know that TBS contributes more to dakwah programs. TBS has created many helpful programs for Muslim communities, particularly new converts, affected by societal challenges and trends.

“After 7 years of Islam, I mastered solat and recitation. I was alone yet Allah gave me strength. Baitulmal offers several aids for new Muslims....” (P3).

This statement is supported by P1, P2, P4 dan P5, because when they converted to Islam, baitulmal was already providing financial aids to new Muslim converts in Sarawak.

“I was requested to apply for help in Baitulmal in 2008 after converting to Islam, but I couldn't travel far. HIKMAH donated a TBS-logo bag....” (P1).

"When I had marriage troubles in 2018, I was staying at Anjung Singgah, and TBS provided me with spending money, followed by numerous other assistance from JAIS, USK, MACMA. I'm renting, my dad's here. aid continues..." (P2).

Islamic Agencies

JAKIM and IIC also organize religious lectures, religious counselling, and social welfare programs for new Muslim converts in Sarawak. P2 was interviewed about her involvement in these agencies' programs.

"I attend IIC's weekly and monthly Muslim programs because of the amazing sharing. I also took a recitation guidance session with a JAKIM ustazah and was selected for JAKIM's UMMAH social welfare program. My ustazah named me..." (P2).

Non-Governmental Agencies (NGO)

HIKMAH, YADIM, MACMA, and PERKIM are Sarawak's new Muslim converts' NGO's. They provide religious and humanitarian programs for new Muslim converts. P3's study shares NGOs' experiences.

"I'm 64, don't work, and enjoy their events. Since my father is Chinese, I am a member of MACMA and help PERKIM manage donations like secondhand clothes. Even though I'm engaged in USK, HIKMAH always asks for my name to give names of new Muslim converts for ibadah qurban donations" (P3).

In Sarawak, the support system has been around for a while and actively helps new Muslim converts, according to studies. New Muslim converts who don't socialize won't know about the support system. New Muslim converts in Sarawak who seek help will not be forgotten or neglected.

Theme 4: Counselor's Role

JAIS has no family counselors. Everyone agreed. JAIS offers family counseling. This study's interview outcome questions 15–18 revealed the 4th subject. Four spontaneous questions arose from study participants' responses. This study showed JAIS needs registered counselors in comparable scenarios.

Counselling session

When answering this question, P1 agrees on the need for the expertise of counselors as a support system for our new converts to Islam. Below is the P1 participant's answer to the question through his or her own experience in the field.

Question 15: Do new Muslims need counseling?

As a Nuqaba convert and USK volunteer, you learn our relatives have many hidden difficulties that damage them and their family. Even if you don't convert to Islam, you can have intercourse with the original family. His family will persuade him to leave Islam. Family conflict worsens. Counselors matter. A family-oriented counselor is essential for counseling.." (P1).

Counseling Service

All participants said I had never referred them to a counselor since becoming Muslim. However, they stated they knew counselors advise clients because they often accompany our relatives who are referred to the JAIS counseling center for domestic issues. Two years earlier, P2 participants were directed to a counselor for marital issues.

Question 16: Have you ever been referred to a counseling program after converting to Islam?

“...I initially met a counselor at Anjung Singgah for assistance, which solved my household issues. For our brothers, it is really useful because like us, they recognize this is a test from Allah, what happened is already qada ‘and qadar, but it has been a long time... ups and downs... this new relative should now consult a counselor to settle all the concerns....”(P2).

Support and Motivation Program

The researcher is curious about the findings from the study participants, who were quite active in coaching and assisting our brothers in the field. Our relatives need help and encouragement to overcome the challenges they confront after converting to Islam, according to P4 and P5 participants.

Question 17: What are the common problems faced by our relatives who need counseling referral?

“...It's hard for non-experts like us volunteers to help because people's life and tests are different. As brothers, we have similarities, but our strength and resolve are different. Yes, a special counselor might help, but maybe his life was harder. needed to encourage and support our brothers”(P5)

“...obstacles specific to today...convert to Islam we rarely hear help...more issues remain... convert to Islam only Malays who are not good at training their wives about religion but don't steal, send their ladies to study, do nice things for Islam at home, there is a man too lazy to work for our brother's wife, sure, he's seeking a living.... He's addicted. da...jadi mu nada kaunselor untuk rujuk masalah daknya....need support and motivation,” (P3).

Lessening the burden of volunteers

P4 addressed this question by recounting her conversion to Islam. P1 recounted her experience with many personal challenges presented by young Muslim converts. She believes that a specialized counselor might ease volunteers' strain of dealing with new Muslim converts' personal concerns.

Question 18: Do you agree if a designated counsellor is provided to communicate with our new Muslim converts?

“Vital. Because a trained counselor will aid our new Muslims. Because converting to Islam without a counselor was sad. If there's a designated counsellor, we may propose new Muslim convert instances to them since as volunteers, I'm concerned that we'd give wrong advise, would feel so much lighter.” (P4).

"Counselors should inform new Muslims. New converts may be traumatized because only individuals with marriage issues or divorce seek counseling. JAIS counselors. Referrals lessen volunteers' workload." (P1).

Discussion

From Lundu to Lawas, Sarawak has an estimated 50,000 people. This makes many Muslim convert difficulties difficult to resolve. JAIS, Sarawak's Muslim community agency, needs aid, especially from Malay Muslims. New Muslim converts have various problems, therefore Sarawak's Muslim community understands their answers (Kassim et al., 2013). Sarawak's new Muslim converts are diverse and have various demands (Salim, 2018). Dakwah programs and activities must be customized to local context to avoid conflict between new Muslim converts and non-Muslims. Thus, dakwah using ethnic and racial figures is the best approach.

This study found that many new Muslim converts overcome hurdles. Sarawakians are friendly and tolerant, which may affect this factor. The Sarawak community's reception of Islam is good (Efendi, 2021). Converts make friends and integrate into the community (Ali & Abdullah, 2020). This may also explain why family members initially reject Islam conversion but ultimately accept it. Compared to other religions, new Muslim converts were shamed and insulted their families. Islam was misunderstood from the start. Mualaf who convert to Islam will lose their family and their inheritance (Hutagalung, 2015). Now, everyone can simply access diverse Islam sources. Muslim communities are more receptive to self-study of Islam. Before this, they had little information and only heard lies about Islam from Islamophobes.

Research demonstrates that not all Muslim converts have issues. Many Sarawak Muslim converts and research participants agree. Muslim converts often preserve solid family relationships. Most Sarawak Muslim converts convert after receiving hidayah from Allah S.W.T. and following their future spouse's religion to simplify marriage (Amiranadira, 2018). Muslim converts obey Allah S.W.T, their parents, their willingness and marriage, and others (Kawi et al., 2020). Muslim Ibans predominate. Bidayuh, Melanau, Chinese, and others follow. Other Muslims can help converts. Sarawak Muslim converts immediately join Persatuan Urus Setia Saudara Kita.

The research shows that not all Muslim converts have problems. The research participants and many Sarawak Muslim converts confirm this. Muslim converts frequently maintain good relationships with their family after converting. Most Muslim converts in Sarawak convert because they have received hidayah from Allah S.W.T. and follow their future spouse's religion to simplify marriage (Amiranadira, 2018). Muslim converts embrace hidayah Allah S.W.T, their own willingness and marriage, following parents, and others (Kawi et al., 2020). Ibans are the majority Muslim race. Bidayuh, Melanau, Chinese, and others follow. New Muslim converts can get assistance from other Muslim ethnicities. New Muslim converts in Sarawak automatically join Persatuan Urus Setia Saudara Kita.

Converts also struggle with integrating to Islam, family pressure, society perception and acceptability, marriage and divorce issues, estrangement, and low self-esteem (Kawi et al., 2020). "Saudara Kita" who converted to Islam experienced psychological and spiritual strain before and after their conversion (Tan & Fariza, 2009). This research indicated that Islamic organisations and NGOs help new Muslim converts as well as Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak. New Muslim converts need community support and assurance, especially while facing many obstacles and issues that require mental and spiritual stamina (Hew, 2017). Tan & Pao (2007) agrees that new Muslim converts benefit from competent support and patient guidance.

Participants also suggested a Sarawak Dedicated Protection Centre for new Muslim converts. Sarawak has no such center. There are only transit homes monitored by NGOs, and

there is no specific education module for new converts. The research participants' comprehensive center provides physical and spiritual safety for new Muslim converts. The center can also help Muslim converts, especially those who have converted for a while but have not received direction. This inquiry also found no Bahagian Dakwah Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak-registered counsellor for new Muslim converts. According to (Jayos & Jasmi, 2013), new Muslim converts need professional counseling to deal with internal and external issues. According to this research, Muslim converts can only complain to Urus Setia Saudara Kita dakwah officers or volunteers.

Welfare solves all Muslim converts' issues. Welfare helps with outer challenges, but internal issues persist. Dakwah police and volunteers can't counsel converts. Counseling can prevent and treat murtad, especially for new Muslims (Siti & Ismail, 2017). Counsellors with diverse talents are needed to help newly converted Muslims (Ahmed & Amer, 2013). Thus, modern counseling skills are stressed to meet the needs of newly converted Muslims (Chevannes, 2002). New Muslims can identify concerns through counseling. Early detection and filtration aid real-world solutions. Counseling can help dakwah officers and volunteers focus on religious guidance seminars and welfare activities.

Implications

Since many Muslim converts still face challenges, this research does not diminish their hardships. Ali & Abdullah (2020) highlights the mualaf group's adaptation issues to help them overcome them without disparaging them. Research participants requested specialist counseling. If mistreated, Muslim converts may leave Islam (Guleng et al., 2014),

Multi-racial, multi-religious Sarawak. Islamic Sharia requires a counselor for converts. Counseling requires charm, composure, empathy, and other qualities (Kushendar & Fitri, 2018). Islamic counselors must demonstrate sharia ethics, behavior, and personality. Islamic counselors are honest, persistent, and aggressive. Honest and dedicated counselors work well and responsibly (Haryati, 2018).

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

Kuching's multiracial Muslim converts were studied. Study Sarawak converts. Covid-19's social distancing constraints made recruiting participants challenging. All interviews and recordings followed SOP. Careful interviews and recordings limited face-to-face contacts that were not allowed throughout this investigation.

CONCLUSION

According to this study, Muslim converts need more organized help. Anyone who can help Muslim converts become authentic Muslims should. Helping our new converts with competent counselors is important. Sarawak's Muslims promote Muslim conversion. This helps treat and guide newly syahadah Muslims and prevent Sarawak Muslim conversion murtad situations.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The research examined issues, hypotheses, and treatments. RA, SJ, and FY gather data and create a study. II, NFAB, and NFMY were consulted for NFAB and NFMY's research. RA,

SJ, and FY then write research papers. NFAB and NFMY analyze data. II, NFAB, and NFMY compile a report after the evaluation.

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APPENDIX

Table 1. Demographic Data

Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Age (Year)	33 years old	54 years old	64 years old	50 years old	50 years old
Gender	Female	Female	Female	Female	Female
Race	Iban	Chinese	Melanau	Bidayuh	Kayan
Previous Religion	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian	Christian
Period of Conversion to Islam	13 years	30 years	44 years	27 years	10 years
Marital Status	Married	Divorcee	Married	Married	Divorcee
Academic Qualification	SPM	LCE Level	Sekolah Dewasa	Diploma	SPM
Occupation	Volunteer for USK Kuching	Self-employed /Volunteer for MACMA	Self-employed / Volunteer for USK Kuching	Self- employed / Volunteer for USK Kuching	Self- employed/ Volunteer for USKPJ

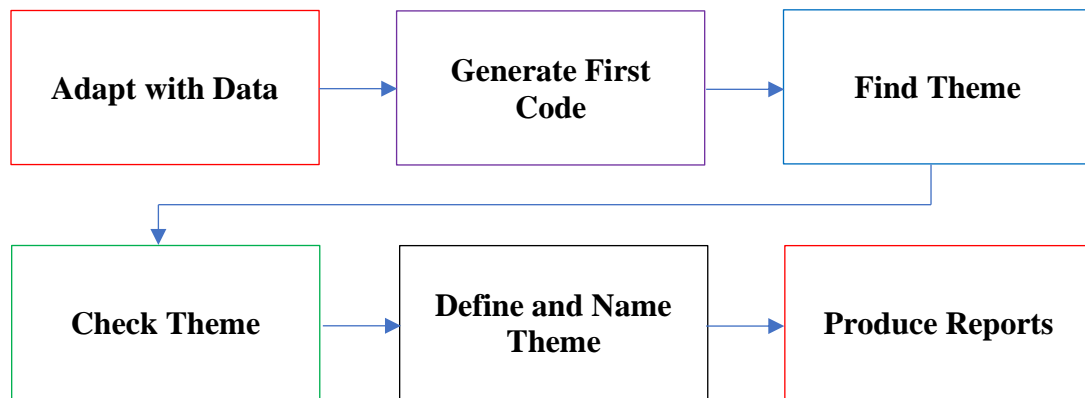
Table2. Gender and Reasons of Converting to Islam (Research Participants)

No.	Pseudonyms	Gender	Race	Reason of Converting to Islam
1.	P1	Female	Melanau	Attracted by her mother's family's Islam conversion.
2.	P2	Female	Bidayuh	Found the genuine faith by herself. She studied Islam before reciting the syahadah.
3.	P3	Female	Chinese	She failed traditional and advanced treatments. Her uncle, her mother's younger brother, suggested rukyah. Marrying an Indonesian Muslim converted her uncle. While recovering at her family's house, she was captivated to Islamic rituals like congregational prayers. Muslim in Pontianak, Indonesia.
4.	P4	Perempuan	Kayan	Her non-Muslim husband approved of her Islam conversion. She delayed Islamizing her husband. She liked Islamic prayers. She divorced him for not becoming Muslim.
5.	P5	Female	Iban	She learned about Muslims in Lundu's Malay kampong. She lives near the mosque. During Subuh's azan, she was upset. Muslim classmates. Her Muslim friends taught her solat, Iqra, and short prayers. Post-SPM, she worked in Kuching. Kuching Muslimized her.

Tabel 3. Summary of Overall Themes Matrix Based on Main Themes, Minor Themes And Categories

Major Themes	Minor Themes	Category	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5
Theme 1: Adaptation towards internal and external challenges after converting to Islam	Self-Strength	Sadness	/	/	/	/	/
		Fear	/	/	/	/	/
		Worry	/	/	/	/	/
	Social Support	Parents and family	/	/		/	/
		The Malay community	/	/		/	/
Theme 2: Adaptation strategies after converting to Islam	Thought Patterns	Self-confidence	/	/	/	/	/
		Not giving up	/	/	/	/	/
		Independence	/	/	/	/	/
		Correct intentions	/	/	/	/	/
		Challenges as a form of motivation	/	/	/	/	/
		Self actualisation	/	/	/	/	/
		Motivated in seeking knowledge	/	/	/	/	/
	Support system	Learning with a teacher	/	/	/	/	/
		Protection Centre	/	/	/	/	/
		Religious programs and classes	/	/	/	/	/
Theme 3: Continuous support system for adaptation challenges for Muslim converts	Jabatan Agama Islam Sarawak	Saudara Kita Development Unit	/	/	/	/	/
		Saudara Kita Management Sarawak	/	/	/	/	/
		Nuqaba Mualaf	/	/	/	/	/
	Tabung Baitumal Sarawak (TBS)	Financial assistance	/	/	/	/	/
		Education assistance	/			/	/
		Welfare	/	/	/	/	/
	Islamic Agency JAKIM	Religious guidance	/	/	/	/	/
		Welfare	/	/	/	/	/
		Religious programs and lectures	/	/	/	/	/
	Islamic Information Centre (IIC)		/	/	/	/	/
Theme 4: Role of Counsellor	Counselling Programs	Religious guidance	/	/	/	/	/
		Welfare assistance	/	/	/	/	/
Theme 4: Role of Counsellor	Counselling Programs	Counselling sessions	/	/	/	/	/
		Advisory services	/	/	/	/	/
		Motivational and Support Programs	/	/	/	/	/
		Lighten the load of volunteers	/	/	/	/	/

Figure 1. The six phases of thematic analysis according to (Braun & Clarke, 2006)



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