Harmony in Diversity: The Dynamics of Interfaith Families

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Abstract

In Indonesia, a nation characterized by its diverse religious landscape, the phenomenon of interfaith families provides a distinctive lens to comprehend religious coexistence. This investigation delves into how religious beliefs are shaped within interfaith families, scrutinizing the ways in which these households manage the intricacies of varying religious views. Utilizing qualitative research methodologies, the study zeroes in on four Indonesian families, each hailing from different religious backgrounds. The research method includes thorough interviews and observational techniques, aiming to unravel the nuances of religious observance, communication, and the resolution of conflicts within these families. The results highlight the critical roles of mutual respect, transparent communication, and a collective dedication to familial harmony in preserving a balanced atmosphere. Notwithstanding their religious disparities, these families demonstrate significant levels of tolerance and comprehension, allowing individual members to freely engage in their respective religious practices. This study accentuates the significance of embracing diversity and nurturing tolerance as fundamental factors for the harmonious coexistence of varied religions within a domestic framework.

Keywords: *Interfaith Families, Religious Tolerance, Religious Coexistence*

Abstrak

Di Indonesia, negara yang ditandai oleh pluralitas agama, fenomena keluarga beda agama menawarkan konteks unik untuk memahami koeksistensi agama. Penelitian ini mengeksplorasi konstruksi kepercayaan agama dalam keluarga beda agama, mengkaji bagaimana keluarga-keluarga ini menavigasi kompleksitas perbedaan keyakinan agama. Menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif, studi ini berfokus pada empat keluarga Indonesia dengan latar belakang agama yang beragam. Melalui wawancara mendalam dan observasi, penelitian ini menyelidiki dinamika praktik agama, komunikasi, dan resolusi konflik dalam keluarga tersebut. Temuan menunjukkan bahwa saling menghormati, komunikasi terbuka, dan komitmen bersama terhadap kesatuan keluarga sangat penting dalam menjaga harmoni. Meskipun ada perbedaan agama, keluarga menunjukkan tingkat toleransi dan pemahaman yang tinggi, dengan anggota keluarga bebas mempraktikkan keyakinan masing-masing. Studi ini menekankan pentingnya merangkul keragaman dan menumbuhkan toleransi sebagai elemen kunci dalam koeksistensi damai agama yang berbeda dalam satu keluarga.

Kata Kunci: *Keluarga Beda Agama, Toleransi Agama, Koeksistensi Agama.*

A. Introduction

Indonesia, a nation characterized by its pluralistic religious landscape, officially acknowledges six religions: Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. This religious mosaic sets the stage for either harmonious coexistence or potential conflicts, pivoting on the principles of tolerance and respect for religious differences. The Indonesian ethos, encapsulated in the national motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*" (Unity in Diversity), advocates for unity amidst diversity, a principle critical in navigating religious pluralism.

In this context, religious freedom has fostered the emergence of interfaith families, a notable phenomenon in Indonesia. The Indonesian Conference on Religion and Peace (ICRP) recorded 1,655 interfaith marriages from 2005 to July 2023, and on average, there are 12 to 15 interfaith marriages every month in Indonesia (Munawar 2023; Siregar 2023), evidencing societal tolerance in religious life. Despite this, comprehensive statistical data on interfaith families remains elusive.

Prior research in this domain reveals diverse perspectives and outcomes. A lot of research has been done on interfaith marriages, such as interfaith marriages among Chinese Muslims in Probolinggo by Syamhudi (2011), how children in interfaith families understand religious differences(Annurburhan 2018), and how family harmony and tolerance work in different situations (Asmaai 2019; Evendi 2019; Hazani 2019; Huda 2018; Kiromi 2019; Mashuri and Helmi 2019; Misbah, Yusuf, and Wijaya 2019; Saepullah, Sinaga, and Zulkarnain 2020; Syah and Mustofa 2020; Syatriadin 2019; Wahono 2018).

Despite the substantial body of research, gaps remain in comprehensively understanding how interfaith families construct their realities amidst religious differences. Interfaith families are highly susceptible to problems because they are willing to take the risk of uniting with someone who has a different religion from theirs (Syatriadin 2019:48). Thus, this study aims to delve into the construction of interfaith family dynamics in Indonesia, assessing how differences in beliefs

within families can lead to both harmony and conflict. Recognizing the susceptibility of interfaith families to unique challenges due to their religious diversity, this research endeavors to enhance insights into managing such differences, with a particular focus on beliefs within families.

B. Method

This study employs the social construction theory as proposed by Berger and Luckmann, with a primary focus on the dynamics of externalization, objectivation, and internalization in comprehending the reality of interfaith families (Suparno, 1997; Basrowi, 2002). The research methodology utilized in this study is qualitative research with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research was chosen to explore the natural context of the subject matter, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument (Sugiyono 2018). Data collection techniques encompass triangulation and data analysis rooted in an inductive or qualitative framework, emphasizing the interpretation of meanings rather than broad generalizations (Sugiyono, 2016). This approach involves the collection of data in the form of textual or visual data, with less reliance on numerical data.

In this study, the sampling technique employed is purposive sampling, where samples are deliberately selected by the researcher to serve a specific purpose. The chosen samples consist of families with differing belief systems. The purpose of selecting these samples is to gather insights into the construction of interfaith families' perspectives regarding belief differences within the family, a crucial aspect of this research. The data collection methods utilized in this research encompass observation and interviews. Primary data are those that the researcher directly obtained for the study. For the purpose of confidentiality, the researcher has abbreviated the names of the informants and their respective families. Below are the descriptions of the four informant families:

Tabel 1 Description of Informant Families

Informant	Name	Status	Religion
Bernadette (65)	M. G. R.	Father	Islam
	B. S. M.	Mother	Catholic

	A. F. S.	First child	Catholic
	V. M.	Second child	Islam
	A. S.	Third child	Catholic
Ryka (35)	S. R.	Mother	Christian
	A. J.	First child	Catholic
	D. P. S.	Second child	Christian
Ashary (22)	H. S. (the late)	Father	Islam
	L.	Mother	Islam
	A. P. S.	First child	Islam
	D. R. P.	Second child	Christian
Ajeng (21)	Y. I.	Father	Islam
	M. I.	Mother	Christian
	A. A.	First child	Islam
	A. F.	Second child	Islam
	A. K.	Third child	Islam

Data Source: Interview Results

Data analysis techniques in this study were based on the Miles and Huberman model. According to Miles and Huberman (in Harianto 2018:49), data analysis involves three simultaneous activities: data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions/verification. Data reduction is the process of sorting and selecting relevant data. Data display involves presenting the data resulting from the data reduction process. Drawing conclusions/verification is the researcher's activity in summarizing the existing data.

C. Result and Discussion

1. The Background of Differences in Beliefs Within Families

This exploration into the factors underlying belief differences within families is informed by the experiences of four informants, each offering distinct insights into the dynamics of interfaith relationships.

Bernadette (65) mentioned that:

"The background of differences in beliefs within the family is because of mutual happiness, respect, and commitment to building a household."

Ryka (35) stated that:

"The background of differences in beliefs within the family is because many of our previous generations had interfaith marriages."

Ashary (22) explained that:

"The background of differences in beliefs within the family is because initially my mother was a non-Muslim, then my father married my mother. Later, my father invited my mother to embrace Islam. After that, my younger sibling was born and was taken care of by my maternal family, my grandmother, which led my sibling to adopt Christianity. Since my grandmother still practices Christianity, naturally, when my sibling lived with and was cared for by my grandmother, she asked my sibling to adopt the same religion as hers."

Ajeng (21) stated that:

"The background of differences in beliefs within the family is because my mother was more convinced by Christianity, hence she converted to Christianity."

Based on interview result above, Bernadette (65) identifies "mutual happiness, respect, and commitment to building a household" as key in managing religious diversity within her family. This insight suggests that shared values and mutual understanding play a foundational role in maintaining harmony in interfaith family settings. Ryka (35) sees her family's religious diversity as a legacy of "many of our previous generations having interfaith marriages." This perspective points to the influence of family history and generational patterns on current belief systems. Ashary (22) presents a unique viewpoint on the impact of upbringing in religious identity formation, noting the Christian beliefs adopted by his sibling under the care of their maternal family. This highlights the role of familial upbringing and extended family in shaping individual religious beliefs. Ajeng (21) discusses personal conviction, explaining her mother's conversion to Christianity as a result of strong personal belief, underscoring individual agency in religious affiliation within family contexts.

The narratives of Bernadette, Ryka, Ashary, and Ajeng collectively indicate that belief differences within families are shaped by a mixture of personal values, historical family practices, upbringing, and individual convictions. These initial findings align with broader discussions in the field, suggesting that interfaith family dynamics are influenced by both collective family history and personal choices. The insights from these informant stories reveal important indications about the nature of religious diversity within

families. They highlight that differences in belief, far from being mere challenges, can be navigated and embraced through shared values, understanding of family legacies, recognition of the influence of upbringing, and respect for personal convictions.

2. Maintaining Relationships Within Interfaith Families

The maintenance of relationships within families, especially those with differences in beliefs, is a subject of significant interest. The four informants in this study provide perspectives on how they navigate these dynamics.

Bernadette (65) mentioned that:

"The way to maintain relationships within the family is through mutual understanding and reminding each other in case of mistakes, without letting ego take over."

Ryka (35) stated that:

"The way to maintain relationships within the family is by respecting and accepting each other's differences."

Ashary (22) expressed that:

"The way to maintain relationships within the family is by preserving harmony, strengthening tolerance, and continuing to respect each other's religious differences."

Ajeng (21) stated that:

"The way to maintain relationships within the family is by mutual respect, supporting each other during the celebration of their respective religions events or during Eid and Christmas, mutually enhancing the festive atmosphere."

Bernadette (65) emphasizes mutual understanding and the importance of correcting each other's mistakes without ego interfering. This approach aligns with the broader concept that mutual understanding is crucial to maintaining harmony in interfaith relationships. Ryka (35) advocates for respecting and accepting each other's differences. This view resonates with Wahono's (2018) observation that mutual respect and appreciation are key in interfaith families. The emphasis on respect suggests a foundational value essential for interfaith family cohesion.

Ashary (22) mentions preserving harmony, strengthening tolerance, and respecting religious differences. These practices are crucial, as noted by Kiromi (2019), who emphasizes that avoiding coercion in religious choices is vital for family unity. The idea of preserving harmony and tolerance is a recurring theme in discussions about interfaith families, highlighting the importance of these values in maintaining peaceful coexistence.

Ajeng (21) speaks to the practice of mutual respect and supporting each other during religious events, enhancing the festive atmosphere of each other's religious celebrations. This practice is a practical embodiment of the principles outlined by Syatriadin (2019), who notes the importance of love, affection, and healthy communication in interfaith families. Celebrating each other's religious events is a tangible way of showing respect and appreciation.

From the statements of these informants, it is evident that mutual respect and tolerance, along with an acceptance of differences, are key to maintaining relationships within families with diverse beliefs. This finding is consistent with the teachings of all major religions about love, harmony, and peace, as noted by Syamhudi (2011).

Mashuri and Helmi (2019) highlight the importance of openness and engagement with all family members, which helps reduce exclusivity in inter-family relationships. This open communication, as further supported by Saepullah et al. (2020), is vital for heart-to-heart understanding between family members. Muhammad (2020) adds that avoiding forcing beliefs upon each other is essential to preventing divisions within the family.

Moreover, Lao et al. (2021) identify five common qualities of effective interpersonal communication in interfaith families: openness, empathy, supportive attitude, positive attitude, and equality. These qualities contribute to a healthy family dynamic where different beliefs can coexist harmoniously. Lastly, Edi et al. (2022) emphasize the importance of mutual respect in religious practices, highlighting the need to support each other in worship, regardless of the religion being practiced.

Overall, these insights suggest that harmony in interfaith families is achieved through a combination of mutual respect, open and effective communication, and a celebration of each other's beliefs. These values not only help in navigating religious differences but also in fostering a deep sense of unity and togetherness.

3. **The Practice of Worship Within the Family**

This section explores how families with diverse religious beliefs manage their worship practices, highlighting the challenges and opportunities these differences present for fostering mutual respect. The experiences of four informants provide insights into this aspect of family life.

Bernadette (65) emphasizes the importance of reminding each other about worship practices and respecting the teachings of each religion: "The implementation of worship within the family involves reminding each other in matters of worship and respecting the teachings of their respective religions." This approach suggests an active engagement in each other's religious lives while maintaining respect for individual beliefs.

Ryka (35) highlights the individual nature of worship obligations within her family: "The implementation of worship within the family is about respecting each family member's individual worship obligations." This respect for individual practices aligns with a broader understanding of religious autonomy within interfaith families.

Ashary (22) shares an example of religious tolerance in action: "The implementation of worship within the family is not a problem, everyone practices tolerance. If my younger sibling goes to church on Sundays because they live with our grandmother in the village, whereas I continue to perform my worship at home." This narrative underscores the peaceful coexistence of different worship practices under one roof.

Ajeng (21) mentions the flexibility in their family's worship practices: "The implementation of worship within the family involves each of us practicing our worship at home or at the mosque. Occasionally, my mother also goes to

church every Sunday." This scenario reflects a blend of individual and collective worship experiences, demonstrating adaptability in religious practices.

From these statements, it is evident that the practice of worship in families with diverse beliefs can be harmonious, characterized by mutual respect and appreciation for each individual's belief system. Supporting statements from previous research further illustrate this. Syamhudi (2011) discusses how sacred events in various religions, like the Hajj pilgrimage, shape believers' attitudes towards other faiths, fostering harmony and mutual respect. Wahono (2018) notes the care families take to avoid foods and beverages prohibited by their respective religions, indicating respect for individual dietary restrictions. Annurburhan (2018) emphasizes that acknowledging differences teaches mutual respect. Hazani (2019) observes that families decide not to interfere in each other's religious practices, a stance that promotes religious autonomy.

Kiromi (2019) describes how family members show support for each other's religious activities, such as attending church services or observing fasts and Eid celebrations. Evendi (2019) notes that couples from different religions maintain and practice their respective religious teachings. Misbah et al. (2019) highlight the discipline with which individuals adhere to their religious beliefs, viewing religion as a personal responsibility. Finally, Muhajir and Anang (2021) observe that interfaith couples support each other's separate religious activities, fostering a spirit of tolerance within the family.

These insights collectively show that in interfaith families, the practice of worship is managed with a high degree of respect, tolerance, and support for each member's religious obligations and practices. This environment allows individuals to maintain their religious identities while cultivating a shared family life that honors diverse beliefs.

4. Existing Issues and Their Resolutions in Interfaith Families

This section examines the challenges and solutions within families with diverse religious beliefs, as described by four informants. Bernadette (65) identifies potential issues related to ego conflicts, particularly those stemming from the husband: "The problems faced in the family might be related to the

husband's ego, which can lead to conflicts of ego." This suggests that interpersonal conflicts, rather than religious differences, can be a source of discord.

Ryka (35) observes that significant problems are not prevalent in her family: "The problems faced in the family are not much exist." Similarly, Ashary (22) mentions a lack of notable issues, emphasizing mutual respect and tolerance: "The problems faced in the family are not very noticeable... There are no issues and we still maintain tolerance." Ajeng (21) echoes this sentiment, attributing the absence of religious issues to established mutual respect: "The problems faced in the family regarding religion are non-existent because, from the beginning, mutual respect has been established."

When it comes to resolving these issues, each informant suggests a unique approach. Bernadette advocates for compromise and religious reminders: "The way to resolve problems is through compromising and reminding each other of their respective religions." Ryka proposes family discussions as a solution: "The way to resolve problems is through family discussions." Ashary emphasizes kindness, forgiveness, introspection, and tolerance: "The way to resolve problems is through kindness, forgiveness, introspection, and tolerance." Ajeng recommends calm and respectful discussions: "The way to resolve problems is through calm and respectful discussions."

Those strategies indicate a preference for familial approaches to conflict resolution, fostering harmony in families with religious differences. Supporting literature further illuminates these dynamics. Huda (2018) suggests that family members advise each other to avoid quarrels, promoting peace. Hazani (2019) notes that couples from different religions consult each other to resolve disagreements. Asmaai (2019) describes how parents in mixed-religion families take the initiative to guide and discuss issues with their children.

However, challenges such as ineffective communication and a lack of empathy can arise in interfaith families, as Putri et al. (2021) point out. They

emphasize the need for consistency, openness, and firmness in communication to convey messages and foster understanding within these families effectively. Thus, while interfaith families may face unique challenges, the strategies of compromise, open discussion, and mutual respect, as shared by the informants and supported by literature, are key to maintaining harmony and resolving conflicts in these diverse family settings.

5. Interfaith Family Construction Regarding Differences in Beliefs within the Family

Drawing from the accounts of four informants, we gain Bernadette (65) views differences in beliefs within the family as a part of destiny, likening it to a journey with varied paths leading to a common goal: "In my opinion, the meaning of differences in beliefs within the family is seen as fate, and like a journey towards a goal, the paths taken may vary." This perspective suggests a broader acceptance and understanding of religious diversity as part of life's journey.

Ryka (35) expresses that differences in beliefs should not lead to estrangement within the family: "In my opinion, the meaning of differences in beliefs within the family is that even though there are religious differences, it doesn't mean we should distance ourselves." She emphasizes that all religions fundamentally promote goodness and that accepting and respecting these differences is crucial.

Ashary (22) sees these differences as an opportunity to strengthen each other's faith and embrace the diversity that characterizes their country: "In my opinion, the meaning of differences in beliefs within the family is the ability to strengthen each other's faith, as we live in a diverse country." This viewpoint highlights the exchange of opinions and mutual enrichment within the family.

Ajeng (21) believes that differences in beliefs foster respect and provide an opportunity to learn about and from other religions: "In my opinion, the meaning of differences in beliefs within the family is the ability to respect each other... and to expand one's knowledge of religion through diverse beliefs."

Those narratives collectively suggest that interfaith families view religious differences not as a barrier, but as a personal life principle that enhances perspective and mutual strength. Utilizing the social construction theory proposed by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the construction of interfaith families can be analyzed through the processes of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Basrowi (2002) describes how these processes bridge the subjective and objective realms. In interfaith families, externalization occurs when individuals accept religious differences within the family. Objectivation is observed when family members practice their religions without hindering others' practices, institutionalizing mutual respect and tolerance. Internalization happens when individuals appreciate and identify with the religious beliefs of their family members, thereby integrating these beliefs into their personal and social identity. In summary, the construction of interfaith families in terms of religious differences involves a complex process of adapting, institutionalizing, and internalizing these differences. This process results in a family dynamic where religious diversity is not only accepted but also appreciated, contributing to the richness and depth of family life.

D. Conclusion

This study has illuminated the dynamics within interfaith families through the narratives of four informants. It highlights that differences in beliefs, far from being divisive, contribute to the richness of family life. Key to maintaining harmony in these families is mutual respect and tolerance, along with an embrace of diverse religious practices. A shared atmosphere of respect makes it easier for people to practice worship in accordance with their personal convictions.

In addressing conflicts, a common approach used by interfaith families is to prioritize unity and communication, demonstrating that issues related to differing beliefs are manageable and often not as complex as anticipated. Berger and Luckmann's theoretical framework of externalization, objectivation, and internalization provides a deeper understanding of how these families integrate

and value religious diversity. This study reveals that interfaith families often find strength in their diversity, fostering mutual understanding and a cohesive family unit despite differences in personal beliefs.

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